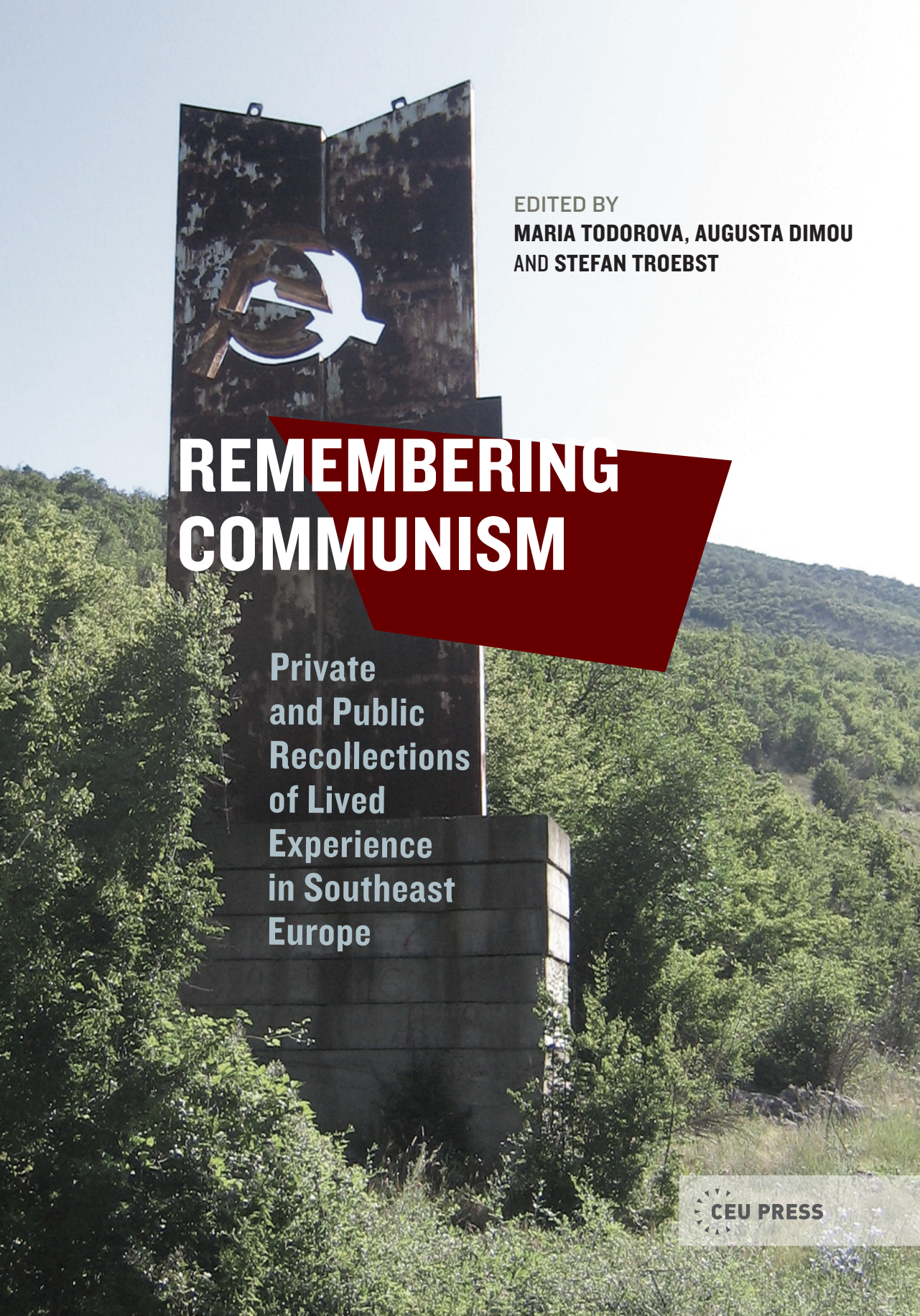




EDITED BY
**MARIA TODOROVA, AUGUSTA DIMOU
AND STEFAN TROEBST**

REMEMBERING COMMUNISM

**Private
and Public
Recollections
of Lived
Experience
in Southeast
Europe**

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REMEMBERING COMMUNISM

**Private and Public Recollections of Lived
Experience in Southeast Europe**

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Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou,
and Stefan Troebst



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1. Introduction: Similar Trajectories, Different Memories

Maria Todorova

The most remarkable thing about the spontaneous street demonstrations in different Bulgarian cities in February 2013 was not their surprising (and totally unexpected) success in toppling the center-right government of Boiko Borisov, but two features that made them unique: the demography of the protesters and their slogans. The crowd was mostly composed of young people, university and high-school students in their teens, and there was an almost complete avoidance of political sloganeering. The protests started over the high electricity bills, but were generally directed against the corruption of the political class, the arrogance of the *nouveaux riches*, and the abject poverty. Some of this was noticed in passing, but not given much weight. Yet, this was the most important lesson: the neoliberal covenant was broken, and there was no memory whatsoever of the past, no allusion to communism.

Political commentators were comparing the street protests to 1989 or 1997 (the fall of the socialist government of Videnov), and were bemoaning the potential for chaos and lack of political maturity.¹ One journalist compared them

¹ Instead of hailing it as an expression of political activism after decades of passivity, even anomie, the writer Georgi Gospodinov and other intellectuals patronizingly mused that this was not the way “to tame sorrow in a civilized society” and that it was a manifestation of a lack of civil society, reminiscent of ochlocracy (Georgi Gospodinov, “Vuprosut ne e koi shte plati smetkite, a koi shte plati provalenia zhivot,” *Dnevnik*, 23 February 2013, http://www.dnevnik.bg/razvlechenie/2013/02/23/2008771_georgi_gospodinov_vuprosut_ne_e_koi_shte_plati/); see also Liubomir Martinov, “Doide li redut na bulgarskata tsvetna revoliutsia?,” *Kultura*, 1 March 2013, <http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/20671>. In contrast, Gospodinov referred to the ongoing protests that started in June and which have turned increasingly into a theatrical happening, as a rebellion of the “beautiful,” “educated,” and “intelligent” (Georgi Gospodinov, “Bulgaria: Citizens Head Back to the Streets,” *Presseurop*, 19 June 2013, <http://www.presseurop.eu/en/content/article/3895871-citizens-head-back-streets>), in line with analyses (Georgi Ganev, “Kogato se nalivaha osnovite—v blatoto,” *24 chasa*, 8 July 2013, <http://www.24chasa.bg/Article.asp?ArticleId=2128990>) which defined them as the rising of the middle class against the symbiotic alliance between oligarchy and poverty.

to the Occupy Wall Street protest movement in New York City. The essence of both movements, she wrote, was a protest against social and economic inequality:

If the idea of “Occupy” has the chance to win in a single country (according to Lenin’s famous formula about communism), this country seems to be ours. After we proved that socialism is not social, and democracy not democratic, we are about to show that this global romantic movement can be pragmatic.... According to the theory, the situation is revolutionary when the upper classes are unable to live, and the people do not want to live in the old way. Well, we are again contrary: the rulers do not want to live, and the people are unable to live in the old way.²

The transition is officially over. In fact it was already over by the turn of the millennium everywhere in Eastern Europe with the end of the privatization process and the legitimization of the new property class. This was the case not only in East-Central Europe, but across the whole region (with the possible exception of Belarus), except that in the rest it took another decade for the realization to sink in. At about the same time one could observe the explosion of a phenomenon that became known under the umbrella concept of “postcommunist nostalgia.” As Gerald Creed wisely observed, the embrace of the term “nostalgia” came at a time—the turn of the century—when attempts at reviving or perpetuating elements of socialism became no longer sustainable, and the very concept not only invalidated the complaints of the disenfranchised but through the commodification of nostalgia furthered the consolidation of neoliberal capitalism.³ Fewer and fewer people have immediate memories of communism, and the pockets with positive memories—among the older and poorer—are marginalized or disappearing. In 2002, sociological surveys found that 33% of Bulgarians had no immediate memory of the socialist period.⁴ A decade later, this

² Veselina Sedlarska, “Revoluia-narode,” *Reduta: Hrono-Sinklastichen Infundibulum*, 3 March 2013, <http://reduta.bg/v2/article/революя-народе>. Ironically, this was the only comment containing an allusion—even in jest—to communism. The protesters were not looking back, and even bloggers commented on this text that it might be of interest fifteen to twenty years from now in the context of historical analysis, but now people did not need interpretations on why this is happening, but rather on how to proceed. An excellent analysis of the language of the protests between the hegemonic liberal and national registers and in the face of a complete disenchantment with the political system is Jana Tsoneva, “Real Power Directly to the People,” *Novi Levi Perspektivi* (New Left Perspectives), 22 March 2013, <http://novilevi.org/nlpenglish/87-real-power>. This Internet publication, patterned after the *New Left Review*, has, as its motto, “It is now easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism” (here attributed to Frederick Jameson but in fact belonging to H. Bruce Franklin).

³ Gerald Creed, “Strange Bedfellows: Socialist Nostalgia and Neoliberalism in Bulgaria,” in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, eds. Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille (New York: Berghahn, 2010), 42–43.

⁴ “33 na sto ot bulgarite niamat preki spomeni za Todor Zhivkov, sochat sotsiolozi,” *Standart*, 9 December 2002. A commensurate number of the poorest Bulgarians (34%) still voted for the

figure is dramatically smaller. Just as in Poland where Edward Gierek was becoming as remote a personality as Boleslaw I, socialism was at best (if it was taught in schools at all) as distant as the medieval period and certainly less known.⁵

At the turn of the century, Charles Maier concluded that while the memory of Nazi crimes had not faded, it had done so for communist ones, a phenomenon he dubbed “the hot memory of Nazism versus the cold memory of Communism.”⁶ In a useful synthesis of the attempts to equate the crimes of the two regimes, he came down on the side of critics like Robert Conquest who, for all his scathing condemnation of Soviet atrocities, felt that the Holocaust was “worse” than Stalinist crimes.⁷ Among the factors he distinguished between targeted and stochastic terror, the qualitative and quantitative differences of complicity and shame, and the incentives to memorize. Maier’s analysis continues to be valid a decade later, even if there are periodic attempts to “warm up” the cold memory of communism.⁸ While he did not develop his analysis further, Maier’s was the rare and very careful voice of the historian, who spoke not of fascist memory in general, but of the particular memory of Nazism, which he juxtaposed not to communism in general, but solely to Stalinism. The memory of Italian, Spanish, or Portuguese fascism is arguably as cold (with analogous sporadic “hot flashes”) as the memory of communism. Maier correctly observed that historical memory is never universal, and that what counts in a proper analysis is investigating who does the remembering, and what is being remembered.

Pierre Nora would add that the recent upsurge of memory has seen a dramatic increase in the uses of the past for political, commercial, and touristic purposes, and that there is no monopoly over the interpretations of the past, certainly not the monopoly of the historian. The latter has to share this place with judges and legislators, victims and perpetrators, journalists and writers:

Socialist Party in 2002, but by 2009 this number dwindled down to 17.7%, as the use of socialist rhetoric could not mask the neoliberal consensus across party lines.

⁵ Hanna Grzempa, “Kommunismus genauso weit weg wie Mittelalter?”, *Eckert. Das Bulletin* 12 (Winter 2012): 38.

⁶ Charles S. Maier, “Hot Memory ... Cold memory: On the Political Half-Life of Fascist and Communist Memory,” Tr@nsit online, 22 (2002) (archive.iwm.at/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&Id=316&Itemid=481).

⁷ Robert Conquest, *Reflections on a Ravaged Century* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2000), xii.

⁸ These come in their most acute form from the newly established former Soviet republics (the Baltic states and the Ukraine). In the academic realm, the latest attempts in this direction have been Vladimir Tismaneanu, *The Devil in History: Communism, Fascism, and Some Lessons of the Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2012); Timothy Snyder, *Bloodlands: Europe between Hitler and Stalin* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); and the discussion their books have generated.

“To claim the right to memory is, at bottom, to call for justice.”⁹ Memory wars are waged essentially over the attempts to impose a universal and mandatory memory on everyone.¹⁰

Yet, outside the purview of these concerns remains how people understand their own lives in light of how official public memory is constructed. At a preliminary workshop, a colleague shared that his dominant—and perhaps only—memory of communism was a constant and thoroughly permeating suspicion and fear. This can very well be an authentic emotional recollection and many, especially among the intellectuals, would corroborate this verdict. Such a recollection undoubtedly provokes disgust with the regime that generated such a reaction since emotions can be generalized as moral positions. Was this, however, a widespread and pervasive feeling? What if this was not the dominant recollection? What if it is not generalizable across the social spectrum? Documenting other cases and showing that fear did not overtake every corner of lived experience and that other emotions (also positive ones) were at play does not imply taking an immoral position. This interest in concrete subjectivity and the relation between individual and public memory is what inspired “Remembering Communism,” a long-term project that has spanned the last decade.

Ideas and Stated Goals

The general goal of the project was to study the processes of remembering communism¹¹ by bringing together two approaches and two diverse bodies of theoretical and historiographical literature: one on memory, the other one on communism.¹² While the project was motivated initially by a critical stance

⁹ Pierre Nora, “Das Gedächtnis des Jahrhunderts,” *IWM Report*, Newsletter 72, 15 April 2005, 4, <http://www.iwm.at/a-con103.htm>.

¹⁰ Małgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, eds., *A European Memory: Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn, 2010).

¹¹ In this text and in the individual chapters, socialism and communism are used as synonyms, since the purpose is not an intellectual history of these currents but an investigation of the period conventionally called “socialist” (as self-designation) or “communist” (as ascription). This use also purposely overlooks the official ideological distinction made by state socialism between the two consecutive stages of socialism and communism. In addition, since postcommunism, rather than postsocialism, has become the broadly used and accepted category, communism too emerges here as the preferred, but not exclusive, category.

¹² Instead of referencing here the weighty literature on memory, from the classics to the memory boom in the past decades, I will mention only a few important review articles and works that have assessed the state of the field in different periods: Alon Confino, “Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method,” *The American Historical Review* 102 (December 1997); Gavriel Rosenfeld, “A Looming Crash or Soft Landing? Forecasting the Future of the Memory ‘Industry,’” *The Journal of Modern History* 81, no. 1 (March 2009); Jeffrey K. Olick,

toward existing assessments of communism, especially the transitology enterprise, its emphasis was on the processes of remembering rather than on providing a definitive study of a past period. This attention to the processual aspects of memory stresses the constant and consecutive reassessments and rearticulations of the communist experience and seeks to emphasize lived experience as inflected by present-day political and social exigencies. Of course, this is not to posit an “authentic ontological” experience which is to be compared to later memories. Nor does it posit an authentic primary memory; in a word, it is not about nailing down the past but about an ongoing process of double take. This, by definition, makes the project long lasting because it entails the periodic revisiting of subjects and objects of memory, which is why the notion of *remembering* is favored over the concept of *memory*.

The project comes out of the basic premise that there is no single practice of communism. While one can argue that there was frequently an attempt to impose a blueprint of socialism, hence the “similar trajectories” of our title, there was also no single idea of socialism. The communist experience was extremely diverse, not only geographically and diachronically, but it was pluralized across national, ethnic, social, professional, gender, and generational borders, hence it engendered different memories.¹³ As organizers of the project, we tried to avoid questions whose answers are entailed or suggested already in the query. Of course, we too unavoidably were working from some premises, the most important one being that we took seriously the memories of people who had experienced communism and showed respect to their claims of having lived a full and dignified life, in contrast to claims that all that is remaining from communism is a collection of exotic memories or that people had at best lived halfway normal lives.

There are multiple ways to make the case for “remembering communism.”¹⁴ On a philosophical plane, it allows us to learn about alternative ways of organizing society, or of thinking about or of hoping for the “good life.” Philosophers are divided in their attitudes toward the historical past. Some, especially the ones belonging to the analytical tradition, disregard the historical legacy by treating it as something that relates to present-day philosophy as the history of

Vered Vinitzky-Seroussi, and Daniel Levy, eds., *The Collective Memory Reader* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011); Aleida Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Western Civilization: Functions, Media, Archives* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For the literature on communism, see notes 21 and 24.

¹³ As a long-term endeavor, this project could cover the whole communist and postcommunist world in a global setting, including China, Central and Southeast Asia, Africa, and parts of Latin America, but also spaces where communism was never in power, but was strong and is remembered nonetheless (e.g., Greece, Spain, Italy, France, Latin America, etc.).

¹⁴ A version of this argument was made in the introduction to Maria Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2010).

science relates to science. Others, however, argue that one can and does periodically turn to predecessors for glimpses of truth, or at least valid insights, such as can be brought back to the present. Given the concrete situation today, it would be instructive to look not only at the record of violence of communism, of authoritarian and totalitarian practices, but also at the communist legacy in education, culture in general, health care, and welfare. More broadly, this is part of the memory of the Left alternative (social democratic, anarchist, communist, etc.) in Western Europe and North America as well, something that will highlight in a proper comparative perspective the place of the communist experience as one of the major (the evaluative component quite apart) reformist and modernizing drives of modernity. While it is not to be idealized, it would be difficult to dismiss it. This is definitely not a nostalgic look back, but an attempt to broaden the “horizons of expectations” while staying true to the “spaces of experience.”¹⁵ As Plato reminds us, there is no city so corrupted that it does not realize something of the true city.

Closely linked to that is a certain political imperative. We still need serious explanations of a couple of across-the-border phenomena: one is the periodic return of the Left (not necessarily only former communists) in the political leadership of Eastern Europe;¹⁶ the other is the general phenomenon of post-communist nostalgia, its mechanisms and articulation. It is a problematic that cries out for comparative study. More specifically, it poses the question under what conditions can terrible, or at least unpleasant things, be forgotten? This has important implications for social reconciliation. It also underscores the gap between legal and institutional change on the one hand, and the public’s perceptions and attitudes toward democracy, on the other hand. But the problem has a wider resonance and it has to do with the worldwide reception and reactions for/against globalization. Not only is there no “end of history,” as well as no end of ideology, the symptoms point to an incipient rise in the leftist orientation and a renewed interest in leftist politics. Thus, the elaboration of a concrete, historically grounded, and nuanced scholarly perspective on the communist experience and its legacy remains mandatory.

There is an historical and existential urgency about approaching the problem: simply put, people who “remember” the beginnings of communism in

¹⁵ Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985), 270–75; David Engerman, “Introduction: Histories of the Future and the Future of History,” *The American Historical Review* 117, no. 5 (December 2012).

¹⁶ At the early stages of postcommunist development, one could read politically correct and superficial analyses about the fundamental distinction between the Central Europeans who had rid themselves of their communists, and the rest (the Balkans, Russia, and the former Soviet Republics) who were irredeemable. As usual, the practice challenges great models, and there is the uncomfortable fact that this happened also among the “best”: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary.

Eastern Europe as a lived experience are quickly dying out. The ones who were born under communism, and spent all their formative years under this regime—the ones forty to seventy years old—are busily adapting, or actively forgetting. At the same time, in the societies that in the past quarter century have moved away from communism, research on the communist past understandably focuses on the oppressive side of the system. This makes rather pressing the scholars' task to rescue from oblivion or from disappearance the artifacts, but especially the thoughts, about this past. Although the oral record is the first to fall into oblivion, the cultural heritage in general is fragile. There is already an enormous body of memoirs waiting to be collected and systematically interpreted. What at first glance might seem a simple rescue operation is methodologically challenging: it entails creating, systematizing, and/or preserving an incredibly rich and unique source for scholarly analysis. One of the challenges is to try to capture and salvage from oblivion not only a memory of a particular past and its cultural heritage that belongs to the less wealthy part of the world and is, accordingly, more endangered, but also one that today (and quite apart from the reasons and justification for it) is publicly denigrated, producing a culture of defeat and a politics of regret.¹⁷

The politics of memory, which is a work of progress in itself with no clear outcome, can be successful only if it relies on or is in agreement with (some kind of) lived experience. Because memory is polysemic by nature, there will always be memories that resist the politics of memory produced by authorities and institutions, which is reductive by definition. In a fine exegesis of Halbwachs, Marie-Claire Lavabre speaks of memory as a *milieu de rencontre*, literally a meeting place, but conveying something more, a place of exchange, a place of communication.¹⁸ Collective memory, she explains, is not the simple adding up of individual recollections. In this respect, Jeffrey K. Olick makes the useful distinction between *collected memory* (as an aggregate of individual memories) and *collective memory* as “a social fact in and of itself,” though he warns against the implicit transcendentalism of this formulation.¹⁹ Individual recollections are made possible by collective memory, which is a fact of communication between individuals. Collective memory, in its turn, is a product of individual remembrances. It too eventually follows a process of homogenization and reduction, but at every level it is dynamic, a work of progress. Located at

¹⁷ Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *The Culture of Defeat: On National Trauma, Mourning, and Recovery* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 2003); Jeffrey K. Olick, *The Politics of Regret: On Collective Memory and Historical Responsibility* (New York: Routledge, 2007).

¹⁸ Marie-Claire Lavabre, “Usages et mésusages de la notion de mémoire,” *Critique internationale* 7 (April 2000): 54–55. See also Marie-Claire Lavabre, “Can We Influence Memory?,” in *History and Memory: Present Reflections on the Past to Build Our Future* (Macao: Macao Ricci Institute, 2008), 471–77.

¹⁹ Olick, *The Politics of Regret*, 7, 23–33.

the intersection of individual and personal memory with the politics of memory, the contributions to this volume seek to express their complex dialectic.

Ideas Implemented: The Ethnography of the Project

It would be appropriate to start with the genesis of this project, since original sins often shape subsequent practices. The project started as a joke at my first meeting of the Eastern Europe/Eurasian Regional Advisory Panel (RAP) of the Social Science Research Council (SSRC) when we were discussing the *raison d'être* of the RAP. I suggested in jest that the only thing which today still makes the area from Central Europe to Central Asia an adequate and valid unit of analysis is the memory of communism, since it was the only period of experience that this huge territory shared at any point of history. This was during the times when the only legitimate topics revolved around democratization, liberalism, constitutions, NGOs, and the like. Over my protestations that I was only a nineteenth-century historian with occasional and limited forays in later centuries, I was asked to formulate a suggestion. How the joke turned into a suggestion, a memorandum, a discussion, and finally into a workshop and a project, is what I consider communism's personal revenge on me.

With the support of the SSRC, we started modestly, within a national context that had usually been neglected: the Bulgarian. The idea was to attract a critical mass of researchers, expose them to the theoretical literature, and then apply for larger project funding. The seed money was used to purchase relevant literature and to organize a couple of training seminars on autobiography and oral methods, to be run by Professors Hanna Schissler of the Georg-Eckert-Institute for International Textbook Research in Braunschweig, Germany, and Carolyn Steedman of Warwick University, UK.²⁰ A conference in Braunschweig and another one at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign resulted in a couple of comparative volumes.²¹

It was the generous support of the VolkswagenStiftung that allowed us to launch a parallel comparative research agenda. The core of the research was

²⁰ This is the place to also acknowledge the critical contribution of several scholars to an inaugurating workshop in Sofia in 2002: Caroline Humphrey, Bruce Grant, Riki Van Boeschoten, Frederick Corney, the much regretted late Chavdar Naydenov, and especially Seteney Shami.

²¹ Todorova, ed., *Remembering Communism*; Maria Todorova and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York: Berghahn, 2010). At the same time, Stefan Troebst also edited and coedited several comparative volumes: *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie: die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa* (with Ulf Brunnbauer) (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2007); *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen im Süden und Osten Europas: Bestandsaufnahme und Forschungsperspektiven* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2010); *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989: Deutschland, Frankreich, und Polen im internationalen Vergleich* (with Etienne François, Kornelia Kończal, and Robert Traba) (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013).

structured around two relatively understudied cases of European communism—those of Bulgaria and Romania—supplemented by two additional analyses of Poland and East Germany, serving as control cases with respect to public and historiographical interpretations. Chronologically, while the project naturally covers the whole post-Second World War period, for practical purposes, given the generations that are the object of study, it focuses primarily, but not exclusively, on the period after de-Stalinization.

There were two delicate issues a project such as ours had to confront from the outset, and both have to do with the fact that the whole problem of “remembering communism” is very dynamic and its reception changing. The first was the circumstance that when we started, the accepted approach to issues of communism was almost exclusively institutional, normative, prescriptive, accusatory, and moralizing. Within Bulgaria and Romania this continues to be so, although to different degrees and with changing periodicity. To this day projects about communism are unofficially referred to in color shades: blue (from light blue to dark-blue and violet) for the ones described as liberal and anti-communist and red (from pink to crimson to dark red) characterizing the ones perceived as pro-communist. There is little intellectual exchange between the two approaches. In the work of the best representatives of both trends we get a balanced picture and they both advance our knowledge of the communist period. As a whole, however, the emphasis in the first is on the crimes of communism, whereas the second stresses its gains. In a rare and lucid assessment of the situation, Alexander Vezekov made a strict distinction between the attempts at normalizing the regime and postcommunist nostalgia. He lamented the lack of dialogue and appealed for a more self-reflexive and depoliticized attitude.²²

The way we handled this situation was by attracting scholars across the perceived and self-perceived political divide. We started with the above-mentioned methodological workshops on memory, autobiography, and life histories, by distributing relevant theoretical literature, and by staging exercises in how to assess subjectivity. The latter was particularly interesting and revealing. A self-interview questionnaire was compiled and distributed among the group of Bulgarian participants.²³ Not all participants were amenable to it, yet they all par-

²² Alexander Vezekov, “Za nenormaliziraneto na komunizma,” in *Bilgarskiiat komunizъм: debati i interpretatsii*, eds. Mikhail Gruev and Diana Mishkova (Sofia: CAS & Riva, 2013), 245–73. The volume is the outcome of a 2011 conference. Vezekov’s contribution and (partly) Rumén Avramov’s were chastised for relativizing the place of the socialist period in the overall history of Bulgaria and for playing the role of Nolte in what the editors (assuming a Habermasian mantle) see as a Bulgarian *Historikerstreit*. Historical analogies, even if useful, are not necessarily apt historical comparisons. Unprecedentedly, Vezekov’s essay is followed by two refutations.

²³ Some of the responses to the questionnaire have been utilized in Liliana Deyanova’s chapter in this volume. Following are the questions, to which about half the participants in the Bulgarian

ticipated in the meetings. The ones who responded in writing shared that even if the questions seemed obvious, they triggered unexpected reminiscences and made people acutely aware of the present moment in which the remembering took place. Most important for everyone was the realization that questionnaires

team responded: 1. Birth date, birth place. 2. Family and social origins. 3. Who was caring for you in your childhood? What did you learn from him/her? What did (s)he tell you about the society we lived in? 4. Where did you study during the different stages of your education? Why there? Do you think others could have your fortunes/misfortunes? 5. Were you a member of political organizations before 1989? What was your private motivation to join (apart from the official motives)? How do you assess your position nowadays? 6. What are the most vivid memories of your youth? 7. What are the main periods in which you would divide your life? How about the society you lived in? 8. What was your first conscious choice? 9. What are the most significant lessons of 1989 for you? 10. Which political events prior to 1989 have influenced you most? 11. Which were the most significant events during the socialist period that transformed it? 12. How did you shape your perceptions of the outside world? Have you traveled abroad before 1989 and where? For what reason? What did you bring back? Your most vivid memories of the encounter with the "outer world"? 13. What did you think of the existing social and political organizations before 1989? 14. What were your personal/professional plans for the future? What did you rely on in order to attain them? Did you have the feeling you could plan your own life? Do you have the feeling that you have failed in the attempt to attain your goals? Reasons? 15. How do you assess your material situation prior to 1989 (your own and that of your parents) compared to your immediate social surroundings? 16. Who was living worse off than you did? 17. What were the privileges under socialism? Were there people you perceived as privileged? Who/what were they? 18. Was there an elite during socialism? Who was part of it? 19. Were you conscious of the distinction "we/they"? What was the boundary between the two? Did you attempt to cross this boundary? 20. What describes your feelings about the past: security/insecurity; freedom/limitations (bans, sanctions); fear of sanctions /lack of fear? 21. Do you have a memory of a conflict with state power in which you yourself or people close to you have either taken part and/or been victims? Did you try to avoid such a conflict? How? Why? 22. Where and when did you begin to think of and assess the system we lived in before 1989? Did you speak with others about it? With whom? How did you compare it to other systems? Did you distinguish between what were its positive sides and weaknesses? 23. Were there intellectuals under socialism? What does this category mean according to you? 24. What were the possibilities of the intelligentsia to freely express its views? Were limitations absolute or relative? 25. Did you express your dissatisfaction with the existing state of affairs? Did people around you? 26. What was the ethnic/religious milieu you lived and worked in before 1989? Did you feel different? Have you encountered conflicts in this respect? 27. Did you have the feeling that something should change in social life? When did this feeling first appear? 28. What was 10 November 1989 for you? Is it a boundary in your personal life? In social life? 29. If you had to define the essence of real socialism in one sentence, how would you describe it? 30. Should we speak about communism today? What should we speak about? 31. How did your parents perceive the period of socialism? Your children? 32. Do you know foreign languages? Where did you learn them? 33. What was your greatest dream? 34. What types of clothes did you usually wear? Your favorite clothes? 35. Were there significant social differences which were created in the socialist period? If so, between what groups, in which period? How would you define them? 36. What do you think today about the positive sides and main defects of real socialism?

are scripts which shape a story even before getting the answers. It was an excellent preparation to step into the shoes of future informants.

It was also a true exercise in self-reflexivity, and it prepared the ground for the reflexive introductions that are preceding the individual chapters of this volume. The specificity of this particular project was that it did not assign topics on a commonly agreed theme and research methods, but gave complete liberty to people to come in with their problematic, relating it very broadly to “remembering communism.” Obviously, the very act of choosing the subjects relates to the process of remembering, be it unconsciously or with a conscious scholarly choice. In what way was it linked to one’s personal life story? Did the constellation in the country—political or otherwise—influence the choice (or avoidance) of a particular theme? These individual prefaces are as a rule very personal, intimate, the stuff of subjectivity. The style is open: they can be reticent, serious, humorous, or whimsical. But they are a signature trait of the volume.

We also made sure that our yearly conferences in Sofia and Bucharest were widely advertised and open to the broad public. In the course of several years the problematic of the socialist everyday and socialist subjectivity has become surprisingly acceptable (granted, in different measures in the two countries, as can be seen from the state-of-art contributions by Iskra Baeva and Petya Kabakchieva, and Cristina and Dragoş Petrescu in the first part of this volume). In the meantime, it certainly was already widely accepted in Western scholarly work.²⁴ This poses the question of the specific contributions of a project and volume such as ours. Very briefly, it is in presenting voices from the region, voices belonging to several generations of scholars, some of whom are increasingly familiar but not sitting entirely comfortably in the Western discourse, with the exception of the youngest generation socialized in academic institutions that are teaching comparable if not identical curricula. If this may sound slightly defensive and apologetic, it is not. We need to hear the preoccupations, interests, and voices of East European academics on their own turf, some of which are not

²⁴ Here is a brief list of the most notable recent contributions: Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005); Karin Taylor, *Let’s Twist Again: Youth and Leisure in Socialist Bulgaria* (Vienna: LitVerlag, 2006); Stephen V. Bittner, *The Many Lives of Khrushchev’s Thaw: Experience and Memory in Moscow’s Arbat* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2008); Irina Paperno, *Stories of the Soviet Experience: Memoirs, Diaries, Dream* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Harry G. West and Parvathi Raman, *Enduring Socialism: Explorations of Revolution and Transformation, Restoration and Continuation* (New York: Berghahn, 2009); Paulina Bren, *The Greengrocer and His TV: The Culture of Communism after the 1968 Prague Spring* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010); David Crowley and Susan E. Reid, eds., *Pleasures in Socialism: Leisure and Luxury in the Eastern Bloc* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2010); Paulina Bren and Mary Neuburger, eds., *Communism Unwrapped: Consumption in Cold War Eastern Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

entirely adapted to the Western academic discourse (even as they have been mediated through translation and editing).

The second issue was one that most projects dealing with Eastern Europe are facing: the entrenched suspicion that these NGO-type and foreign-financed projects impose themes of interest to outside researchers who are using local expertise solely as raw material. We were thus especially alert to the danger of turning East European academics into data collectors and Western ones into analysts. There was also the additional suspicion that it was only a small circle of beneficiaries of the same limited clientele around NGOs and projects that were being rotated. How did we deal with these challenges? We decided to tap into existing expertise, assembling scholars who were already working on this problematic, and allow them to form teams based on previous cooperation and trust. Over thirty people were involved in the project, roughly half of them Bulgarian and the other half Romanian, with a small Polish and German participation. There were enough funds for equipment and supplies (laptops, cameras, scanners, printers), literature, for yearly conferences and smaller workshops, as well as for a website and small honoraria for delivered papers. This approach comes with its positive and negative sides.

One challenging aspect was the fact that the project did not have rigorous research parameters. Rather than imposing on them a strictly defined analytical framework on “how memory works,” the project participants were allowed to experiment and explore different venues and theoretical concepts that appeared most suitable to their ongoing research and test them against their own concrete case studies as to their generalizing validity. Notions such as nostalgia, collective, and generational, social, and cultural memory were discussed in relationship to concrete and diverse research endeavors which gave a polycentric character to the project. As a result, the project did not aim at, and the volume does not provide, a meta-analysis of existing studies. Its aim is more modest. What it offers is research to contribute to the existing pool, in the belief that only after assembling a robust quantity of studies can one generate a synthesis. Despite this liberal, even libertarian attitude, several thematic clusters eventually emerged, and these form the separate parts of the present volume.²⁵

On the positive side was the process itself. While it may not be so obvious at first glance, people were growing through an experience, in which they did not see themselves intellectually constrained or patronized by guidance. This experience was generation and place-specific. For both national teams, but for

²⁵ An additional technical (and psychological) difficulty was the organizational maneuvering between these over 30 people, most of them already well-established scholars. Without a substantial monetary incentive that usually camouflages intellectual as well as psychological incompatibilities, an inordinate amount of diplomacy and patience was necessary. Luckily, we had the perfect project coordinator in the person of Augusta Dimou.

Romanians, in particular, the project served to legitimize this problematic. This was more difficult in the Romanian case, because the communist regime had reached its highest degree of unpopularity in the last decade prior to 1989. The memories of deprivations, humiliations, censorship, and duplicity, culminating with the bloody outcome of what has been described as the only “real revolution” in 1989, were still very fresh in the minds of researchers. In addition and perhaps more significantly, while the discourse of communist failure and crimes was and continues to be the dominant one in both countries, it was exclusionary and ubiquitous in the Romanian case, while in Bulgaria it coexists with a secondary discourse, marginal, but nonetheless present in the public space. Discussing their themes with their Bulgarian counterparts, younger Romanian scholars were encouraged to look more calmly at the period, not automatically in the mandatory moralizing denunciatory mode.

In this respect, the two conferences that the project organized for the broad public in Sofia and Bucharest, highlighting the work of the project participants, were crucial. The Sofia conference on “New Approaches to the Memory and History of Communism: Bulgaria and Romania in Comparison” was held in September 2008 at the University of Sofia. It succeeded in bringing in commentators and moderators from practically all institutions that were dealing with similar questions and across the whole ideological and political spectrum. It was opened and closed by two keynote speeches by István Rév from the Central European University and Chris Hann from the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, both delivered in front of a very broad audience at the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate. Equally successful was the October 2009 conference on “Theoretical Approaches to the Memory of Communism” held in Bucharest at the Museum of the Romanian Peasant. Especially stimulating was the keynote address of Thomas Lindenberger from the Center for Contemporary Research (Zentrum für Zeithistorische Forschung) on “Experts without a Cause? Contemporary History between Memory Governance and Ostalgia in Unified Germany,” a more elaborate version of which opens the first part of this volume. It was mostly the contents of this address but also the institutions represented by the speaker, as well as the site where the speech was delivered—the New Europe College—that helped validate the efforts and assuage the insecurities of many participants.

The project was also a useful training ground for older scholars who had not been academically socialized in the present-day discourse and approaches being taught in European and American university curricula. All of them had been exposed to the theoretical literature (in original or in translation) that had been abundantly available in the last decades, but many still felt comfortable with the positivist tradition that still continues to be the dominant mode of humanist production. Working alongside younger colleagues, many of them recent graduates of the Central European University or products of new curricula, they were

stimulated to contextualize their findings beyond the immediate national political framework and within a larger theoretical context. Even if this is not immediately recognizable in all the papers, it has had a beneficial effect on their teaching and mentoring.²⁶

To reiterate, the emphasis of this project and of the resulting volume was more about praxis, about the attempt to open up a space for scholarship in places where it was besieged both politically and conceptually. It did succeed in opening up a situation where people profited from its looseness, where they could share ideas and impressions not constrained by previously assigned parameters. While its main ambition is to add to a more complex and nuanced reading of the period, its relative accomplishments should be seen primarily through the lens of praxis.

Finally, a previously unplanned but enthusiastically upheld idea, which was shaped in the course of the ongoing work, was the production of a dictionary of socialism/communism. The dictionary aims at bringing together a selected vocabulary that characterized social, economic, cultural, and political life under communism. It will consist of lemmata (dictionary entries) specific to the communist period in an endeavor to provide a differentiated form of *Begriffsgeschichte* of the terminology that originated in the communist era in distinct places and at discrete time periods. It is about the linguistic usage of a vocabulary specific to a period that is nowadays disappearing or utilized in a radically altered new context with a radically different meaning and message. As such it can be considered a trademark of private or public remembering (in a positive or pejorative way) of communism. It is about terms that often provoke synoptic associations in the most condensed or symbolic manner and stand emblematic for this period. These entries designate practices (formal and informal), institutions, roles, groups, sectors, and material culture. The dictionary, which is in the process of being finalized, will provide a comparative presentation of a selection of entries from Bulgaria, Romania, Poland, and Hungary.

Understanding Communism by Analogy

The project followed two parallel and at times combined objectives. On the one hand, with a view to memory studies, it aimed at analyzing the social and political circumstances that condition the way memory is constructed, transformed, stabilized, or canonized. To this end, researchers resorted to different methodological tools and sources from oral history projects, sociological questionnaires,

²⁶ The project also supported four graduate research projects (two in Bulgaria and two in Romania) geared toward PhD and MA theses. The networking it provided proved invaluable for all participants.

the analysis of memoirs and diaries, press and internet sites, to popular media of visual mass culture such as feature films, advertisements, and documentaries. Part of the research aimed at capturing the attitudes of specific target groups such as artists, young people, or members of the *nomenclatura*, different social groups such as workers, peasants, and the intelligentsia, as well as specific age groups. On the other hand, more with a view toward communist studies, the project tried to supplement the above picture with analyses of sources produced by the regimes themselves. Here studies on different aspects of political and everyday life under communism were undertaken, focusing on the relationship between social actors and the state. These included state policies toward the family, women, and ethnic minorities, as well as the workings of the secret police.

Our aim was to identify several clusters in which analogical readings could be achieved by circulating the relevant country chapters, so that appropriate cross-references and adjustments could be made. Not all contributions made it to the final volume.²⁷ In the end, seven clusters with several contributions emerged around a number of themes. The rubrics are prefaced by a state-of-the-art section on Germany, Poland, Romania, and Bulgaria, with a synthetic overview of the study of dictatorship in a European context. The other rubrics are devoted exclusively to Romania and Bulgaria, covering topics such as the everyday in material, visual, and popular culture, exploring themes ranging from the semiotics of food and kitsch to cinema and the internet, and the politics of memory and commemoration; schooling, socialist childhood, and generational memories; the disappearing spaces of labor and the fragments of memory left of them, dealing chiefly with industrial sites in urban centers and the issues of class consciousness; remembering the ubiquitous state, from the unfading problem of the secret police to its complex relationship with the artistic and academic intelligentsia; the differences between remembering the system as a whole and specific, sometimes extraordinary events.

The general euphoria following the end of “real socialism,” the opening of the archives, the pouring out of memoirs, the immodest but enthusiastic predictions of a revolution in historical assessment, the gradual if uneven institutionalization of research on communism created at first the deceptive impression of

²⁷ Besides the usual technical explanations—contributions not delivered or not rising to the expected standard—there were a few materials of high quality that failed to be “grouped” with others. Strikingly, this was the case with gender issues. While these were discussed in meetings, none of the participants decided to write on them with one sole exception: Iliana Marcheova, whose paper “Women under Socialism: The Case of Bulgaria” focused on the career of Elena Lagadinova, the chair of the Committee of Bulgarian Women, who had a prominent career in party and state administration. A few other contributions of good quality but that were deemed repetitive or unfitting in the context of the volume have been placed in other publications.

a systemic and undifferentiated approach to the recent past across the board. The reality amply belied these early predictions. What followed, however, was an avalanche of hasty typologies and the attendant generalizations about societies that had allegedly come to terms with their communist past, and such where the communist legacy was persisting. In most cases these typologies served as the academic legitimization of political decisions concerning the speed and direction of European Union accession. The contributions in the first cluster are canvassing the state-of-the-art in several East European countries, beginning with Germany, the case which stands out as the exception and where the process of transition was completed first, and comparing it to one of the most lauded success stories (Poland) and two posited laggards (Romania and Bulgaria).

By general consent, the East German case was unique: the transition was abrupt resulting in a complete institutional rupture and overhaul. The dominant paradigm in the ensuing decades has been the theory of the two dictatorships in German history and how to deal with them. This became effectively a double-edged paradigm. On the one hand, it easily equalized the Nazi and the SED dictatorships, something that has been followed, especially in some of the former Soviet republics (notably the Ukraine and the Baltic states), but also in the countries of the former Warsaw Pact, by comparing Nazism to communism at large, and not to Stalinism only. On the other hand, by continuing to be alert about fascism, the German paradigm deviated from a trend that can be seen in all of the rest of Eastern Europe, namely the denigration of the antifascist struggle, accompanied by the rehabilitation of fascist figures, the embellishment of the interwar regimes as vanished utopias, and their treatment as a lost golden standard, after which communism caused “a detour from the natural development.”²⁸

As the papers in the first part demonstrate, the way communism is perceived and assessed may be a function of the different speeds of exit from communism: very abrupt in the German case, negotiated, but at a different pace elsewhere, perhaps most protracted in Romania, and less so in Bulgaria. Poland, like Bulgaria and unlike the German Democratic Republic, had a negotiated and more gradual transition, but especially in the last decade it has demonstrated a much greater sophistication in the scholarly study of the communism, as becomes clear from the survey of Izabella Main, due in no small measure to the continuity of a strong sociological tradition dating from the communist period.

As in Germany, the archival revolution in the whole region was the central occurrence that triggered interest and numerous projects. But unlike Germany,

²⁸ The quote comes from the contribution of Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism,” in this volume, 43–69. It may be most pronounced in the Romanian case, but it is also very characteristic of Poland, Bulgaria, and the rest of Eastern Europe.

there was not a comparable immediate explosion of attempts to confront the recent past, the striving for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (an untranslatable German term, meaning reassessment, coming to terms with the past, coping and dealing with it, but also including redress, even retribution). The Hungarian writer Péter Esterházy said to this effect, “It is no wonder there is no corresponding word for *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in Hungarian,” because there is no corresponding activity, which he called “work, a European duty.”²⁹ To counter this moralizing and patronizing motif, it should be pointed out that it is not only the East Europeans who are not following this road: it took a whole generation in post-Franco Spain after 1975 to reach the climactic moment of opening mass graves in 2000 and putting the issue on the table, not to mention the lag of a generation and over two decades for the Germans to begin to come to terms with their legacy, a process that is still incomplete.³⁰ In this, the other East Europeans as a whole are following the two-decade lag typical for West Germany, rather than East Germany, where the *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was imposed.

Everywhere, the first years of the transition were dominated by the totalitarian paradigm. In the study of East Germany, the promise of the totalitarianism theory virtually crashed under empirical scrutiny, and what becomes highlighted are aporias, antinomies, and paradoxes, rather than the rigid contours of a regime formula. Elsewhere, there continues to be heated debate about the applicability of totalitarianism (Poland), and there is the quest for alternative theoretical approaches (Bulgaria, in the chapter by Baeva and Kabakchieva). Romania seems to remain one of the few places where totalitarianism remains dominant and unquestioned for the time being.

In none of the countries has the research on communism been organized so early and in such prominent centers as in Germany, and nowhere has it been so well funded, but the growing tendency of the institutionalization of such research is discernible everywhere. One characteristic that sets the German case

²⁹ Péter Esterházy, “Also: die Keule,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 237, 11 October 2004, 7. See also Alfred Grosser, “Response to Péter Esterházy,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, no. 248, 23 October 2004.

³⁰ It also bears mention that a US law requiring the disclosure of classified records related to Nazi war criminals was only passed in 1998, but the CIA has been effectively subverting it by arguing that the law only requires disclosure of records for war crimes, not war criminals, thus effectively blocking information about the agency’s postwar collaboration with former Nazis. (Douglas Jehl, “C.I.A. Said to Rebuff Congress on Nazi Files,” *New York Times*, 20 January 2005). In February 2005, the CIA finally agreed to reverse this legal stance and for the first time acknowledged the existence of such a relationship. The 600-page report by Judy Feigin, “The Office of Special Investigations: Striving for Accountability in the Aftermath of the Holocaust,” and edited by Mark Richard, the Former Deputy Assistant Attorney General, can be accessed at: <http://documents.nytimes.com/confidential-report-provides-new-evidence-of-notorious-nazi-cases?ref=us#p=1>.

apart is its early internationalization, as emphasized by Thomas Lindenberger. This was a result of the general internationalization of scholarship on Germany following the Second World War, but in the aftermath of 1989 it produced work by foreign scholars that was less exposed to and constrained by the local politics of history. This is a tendency whose influence begins to be felt slowly but gradually also in other East European countries,³¹ but it is far from reaching the level of historiographical denationalization posited as desirable by Lindenberger. All the papers of Part I are located within a trans-European framework provided by the theoretically rich survey of Stefan Troebst who puts forward a fruitful comparison between Southern and Eastern Europe, and offers several typologies.

There is a difference between linguistic and nonlinguistic forms of remembrance, and the papers assembled in Part II probe into what is explicitly “said” and implicitly meant when remembering through things. What is remarkable about the three Romanian chapters in this rubric is that the “things” through which they reconstruct memories—food, photographs, and trinkets—all focus on the Ceaușescu era of deprivation, poverty, and misery. Based on the rich oral history and cultural anthropology archive of the Third Europe Foundation under her direction, Smaranda Vultur documents not only the dire situation and the obsession with food in the late 1980s but the power relations and strategies that secured survival. In doing this, she also makes a valuable methodological contribution on the role of the anthropologist. Equally, Simina Bădică’s interest in

³¹ See the literature in note 21. Very important in this respect, especially for Romania, is the work of Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman: Kligman and Verdery, *Peasants under Siege: The Collectivization of Romanian Agriculture, 1949–1962* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2011); Verdery, *National Ideology under Socialism: Identity and Cultural Politics in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1991); Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies: Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999); Susan Gal and Kligman, *The Politics of Gender after Socialism: A Comparative–Historical Essay* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); Kligman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998). For Bulgaria, equally important are the works of Gerald Creed, *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Deema Kaneff, *Who Owns the Past? The Politics of Time in a “Model” Bulgarian Village* (New York: Berghahn, 2004); Kristen Ghodsee, *The Red Riviera: Gender, Tourism and Postsocialism on the Black Sea* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2005); and Ghodsee, “Red Nostalgia? Communism, Women’s Emancipation, and Economic Transformation in Bulgaria,” *L’Homme: Europäische Zeitschrift für Feministische Geschichtswissenschaft* 15, no. 1 (2004): 33–46. See also Pamela Leonard and Deema Kaneff, eds., *Post-Socialist Peasants? Rural and Urban Constructions of Identity in Eastern Europe, East Asia and the Former Soviet Union* (New York: Palgrave, 2002); Chris Hann and the “Property Relations” Group, *The Postsocialist Agrarian Question: Property Relations and the Rural Condition* (Münster: LitVerlag, 2003). Much of this work has been translated in the local languages.

photography stemmed from her attempts to find visual material to document the queue, this ubiquitous attribute of the socialist economies which reached dramatic proportions in Romania in the 1980s. In confronting the lack of images depicting socialist reality and tracing the conditions of image production, she in fact discovers a paradox, namely that the regime feared words more than images. As a result, amateur photography was not censored but actually endorsed as a national pastime producing rare but valuable visual social documentation. The disappointment with the so-called “drawer literature” might be hopefully offset by “drawer photography.” Building on the observation that things convey a certitude that words fall short of, Andi Mihalache focuses on the protective role of the bibelot as a pillar of identity across time. Considered today as kitsch, the bibelots were items of popular luxury during the communist period. Over time, they acquired conflicting functions: while they served at first as a reminder of the bourgeois world destroyed by communism, a kind of rectifying mode positioning the individual in the middle class, after 1989 they conferred stability in the face of unemployment, forced retirement, and general austerity measures and immiseration.

By contrast, the childhood memories of the 1980s by the most active Bulgarian generations in their thirties and forties, as they have emerged online in the last decade, are not ones of deprivation. Paradoxically, these websites mark themselves explicitly as right-wing or libertarian platforms; yet the memories they reconstruct of socialist everyday life are of a happy childhood with opportunities that today’s children are deprived of, thus serving as a radical critique of the transition. Likewise, socialist goods and socialist popular culture were restored in the mass media and especially in cyberspace by the turn of the century. In her analysis of advertisements Milla Mineva stresses that this revival of socialism is the product of the market, of multinational companies in particular, in their efforts to find the most appropriate placement for their goods.

Childhood, approached from different perspectives, is the object of the contributions in Part III. Albenă Hranova analyzes the memory of the youngest generation—university students in their twenties—with no experiential memory of communism. Borrowing from Halbwachs, she introduces the concept of “loan memory” to refer to the stories these young people have read or heard, that help them navigate a social reality remote and foreign to them. In the absence of an institutionalized official memory (the communist period is not taught in high schools), they rely exclusively on oral family history, whenever they deign to come out of their indifference for the period. Based on a number of oral interviews, Cătălina Mihalache attempts to reconstruct the school memories of two generations looking back at the 1950s–1960s and the 1980s accordingly. Contrary to the received wisdom of the school as one of the most powerful brainwashing mechanisms of totalitarian rule, she observes the almost completely apolitical reminiscences of her interviewees and concludes that politics

was refracted through the dominant memory of a relatively inert authoritarian school tradition that spans political ruptures. Anny Kirilova's account of adoption practices rests on a rich ethnographic database of interviews assembled between 2005 and 2008. She charts the history of adoption from traditional adoption within the kinship group which persisted, albeit in modified forms, until the 1960s, when adoption became a strict state policy based on enforced secrecy.

Whether from the perspective of a complex multi-ethnic old Transylvanian city like Cluj, or a mono-ethnic town like Pernik, which became one of Bulgaria's major industrial and energy centers by at the beginning of the twentieth century, or a new socialist mining semi-agrarian town like Rovinari, where competition and resentments followed along local rather than ethnic lines, both Romania and Bulgaria witnessed the same systemic transformations in the wake of the Second World War: drastic industrialization, the build-up of a national infrastructure, collectivization of agriculture,³² massive outflow of rural labor to industrial centers, and deep-reaching cultural changes. Based on different sources—ethnographic questionnaires, oral interviews, life histories, and photographs—these chapters reconstruct industrial work and everyday life under communism in different time periods: the first decades of industrialization (Tania Boneva), the late 1950s to the early 1980s (Tamás Lönhárt and Virgiliu Țârău), the final decade (Corina Cimpoeiru), and the memory of the different stages of the brigadier movement in Bulgaria (Tsvetana Manova).

Lönhárt and Țârău document the drama encountered by “traditional workers” in this Hungarian workers’ stronghold with the massive influx of new Romanian labor from the outside, which resulted in a loss of status from the end of the 1950s on. Their memories of the crisis during the 1980s were compounded by the dramatic increase in nationalist propaganda that further marginalized them. By contrast, because of their specific line of work, the privileged status of miners in Cimpoeiru’s account makes them buy into the dream of the communist “Golden Age.” Bringing in the voices of the workers, Boneva reconstructs in minute detail the workers’ daily life in the process of their adjustment from traditional family structures and customs in the village to the “engineering” of their life in the modern industrial and urban milieu. She pays detailed attention to family roles, gender policies, housing and hygiene, clothing, education and culture, as well as new norms of labor organization, notably the brigade. Manova develops the theme of the brigadier movement through visual sources

³² While a comparative research focus on the village was discussed, given the fact that in the past decade this has been the object of important projects and contributions, it was left outside the purview of this volume. See the literature in note 29; also Constantin Iordachi and Dorin Dobrinu, eds., *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The Collectivization of Agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009).

(photographs) by truly bringing to life this forgotten and often disparaged phenomenon. By juxtaposing the memories of the first generation participating voluntarily in the communist brigades (a cohort born in the 1940s and earlier) to the memories of the last participants in the movement (people born in the 1960s and 1970s) when it ceased to be voluntary and was even paid, she highlights the enthusiasm and selflessness of the first generation which still harbors positive reminiscences of this stage of their life.

What is remarkable in these chapters of Part IV on socialist labor is the richness of personal testimonies documenting the formation of a working-class consciousness, accompanying the privileged economic and social status of the industrial worker (especially the miner) within the overall labor hierarchy. Incidentally, the same situation was typical also of the West where the miners were considered the cream of industrial workers. The deindustrialization and partly ruralization of the economy following the transformation to a market economy after 1989 translated not only in unemployment and economic hardship but also loss of social status. It is unsurprising then that nostalgia for the stability of life under communism is encountered among these strata of the population and the Romanian case, usually marked by the fresh memory of the deprivations during the deep crisis of the 1980s, is no exception in this general East European trend.

The question of the secret services continues to be one of the sore problems of postcommunist societies (Part V). Because of the negotiated character of the transition (with the exception of East Germany), both institutional and personal continuities persist. What Cristina Petrescu calls “the myth of the omnipotence” of the secret police was paradoxically already created during the communist period in the course of internal party struggles, and is being perpetuated in a climate of lack of transparency, crisis, and conspiracy theories. As a result, once the counter-memories came out in the open after 1989, for Romanians the traumatic memories of Securitate terror have become the cornerstone of remembrance of communism, and the prison cell in the Romanian Gulag has become the metaphor for the whole regime and period. The crisis of the 1980s, caused by Ceaușescu’s bizarre economic and social policies, has no parallel in the other Eastern bloc countries, and this is indeed the *differentia specifica* of the Romanian communist regime, which explains why the memory of the “normal” 1960s and 1970s is suppressed, whereas a line of direct continuity is drawn between the terror of the 1950s and the last decade. It is this specificity that marks the contrast with the Bulgarian case. The general moral disgust with the institution and its activities are identical also in Bulgaria, and the jargon for a member of the secret services—*chenge*—has become a universal term of opprobrium. Yet, the attempt to instrumentalize these disclosures of collaboration for the delegitimation of parties, individuals and the whole regime proved unsuccessful since, as Iskra Baeva explains, only a very small part of Bulgarian society saw the pre-1989 regime as undeniably criminal, while the majority

showed different grades of ambivalent attitudes. Baeva's skepticism about lustration corroborates Katherine Verdery's view that "lustration has moved out from politics into society in general and is fulfilling its purificatory functions in unanticipated ways. No longer working to cleanse politics of potentially disloyal or blackmailable officials, it has become a weapon for competition more broadly."³³

The opening of the files of the secret services of the former Eastern bloc is unprecedented in the history of modern statehood and is beginning to produce a new academic genre: scholars confronted with and analyzing their own files.³⁴ In her chapter on the Securitate files, Smaranda Vultur, who has conducted research in the Securitate archive since 2004, gives a close reading of the surveillance process. After interviewing people who have seen their files, she sheds interesting light on their varying reactions and subsequent behavior. Aware of "the difficulties of using the secret police files as repositories of historical truth,"³⁵ Vultur struggles with the methodological, moral, and emotional challenges presented by the encounter with these files and proposes a number of methods to approach the material in a systematic way.

Strangely enough, Part VI ("The 'Cultural Front' Then and Now") is the only one made up exclusively of Bulgarian contributions. Dealing with different aspects of how intellectuals remember and come to terms with the communist legacy, these chapters document both the complexity of the period and the messiness of the process of recollection. The answer to the absence of relevant Romanian counterparts may be explained by what Cristina Petrescu in her chapter on the Securitate defines as the indecency of remembering the "normalized" 1960s when compared to the prison memories of the 1950s or to the memories of deprivation and malaise in the 1980s. The memory of Romanian communism has been tragically and symmetrically bookended and, understandably, still resists a more nuanced approach. Based on eighty interviews conducted with different social scientists (primarily historians), Liliana Deyanova compares the abundance of views, personal assessments, and reflexivity concerning compromises with the ideology or party and administrative apparatus. Her study documents the attitude of different groups in their effort to acquire a monopoly over

³³ Katherine Verdery, "Postsocialist Cleansing in Eastern Europe: Purity and Danger in Transitional Justice," Graduate Center, CUNY, October 2009, 5, <http://www.democracy.uci.edu/files/democracy/docs/conferences/verdery.pdf>.

³⁴ See Timothy Garton Ash, *The File: A Personal History* (New York: Vintage, 1998); Katherine Verdery, *Secrets and Truths: Knowledge Practices of the Romanian Secret Police* (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2012) and *Secrets and Truths: Ethnography in the Archive of Romania's Secret Police* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2014). Verdery has also announced that she is working on a book entitled *My Life as a Spy: Memoirs of a Cold War Anthropologist*.

³⁵ Verdery, "Postsocialist Cleansing in Eastern Europe," 18.

the process of remembering communism. Much is at stake here. Deyanova even documents an interview which questions the legitimacy of our project even before results were produced by claiming that “it substitutes the entire phenomenon with the history of its anthropological and oral reconstruction and claims that the everyday life of socialism in the 1970s and 1980s was not as terrible as some describe it.” The study concludes on a sobering note that we are still far from a situation allowing for new social positions resisting the imposition of political formulations of “scientific truths.”

By offering a very detailed and close reading of the recollections of three theater productions in the 1960s, Natalia Hristova reconstructs the atmosphere of the increasingly liberalizing and rebellious 1960s, the hopes invested, and the subsequent disappointments. She also emphasizes the change in tone in the reminiscences over the last two decades. Finally, she rehabilitates the use of memoirs and oral interviews as reliable sources for the creation of a trustworthy narrative. The chapter by Vasil Markov traces the recollections of the artistic Bulgarian intelligentsia as they are inflected by the post-1989 sociopolitical and cultural context. By the mid-1990s when the difficulties of the transition became far too painful, the initial explosion of condemnatory assessments gave room to a redefinition of attitudes in which the years of communism are seen as a complex, contradictory and shifting relationship between the authorities and intellectuals. Through a micro-study of the memoirs of two brothers, representatives of the prewar bourgeois elite, Iliana Marcheua illustrates the mechanisms of adaptation during the communist periods and highlights the spaces of remembering and forgetting.

While Markov works with textual recollections, Vania Stoyanova in her chapter “*Cum Ira et Studio: Visualizing the Recent Past*” reaches similar conclusions based on her analysis of the cinematic production in Bulgaria in the past two decades, both feature films and documentaries. These visualized representations of communism in the first years after 1989 were truly made “with anger and bias,” focusing on the Stalinist period in the late 1940s to the early 1950s and constructing a visual narrative of violence as the main characteristic of the communist era. With the subduing of political confrontations and the realization that the changes were irreversible, cinematographers started probing into the role of social circumstances and personal choices, i.e., giving more space to contingency and agency. It is a pity that this chapter could not be paired with a similar one on the remarkable new wave of Romanian films justly characterized as the “miracle of Romanian cinema.”³⁶

³⁶ See Alexandru Leo Șerban, “Romanian Cinema: From Modernity to Neo-Realism,” *Film Criticism* 34, no. 2–3 (2010); Monica Filimon, “In Short(s) about the New Romanian Cinema,” *Film Criticism* 34, no. 2–3 (2010); Rodica Ieta, “The New Romanian Cinema: A Realism of Impressions,” *Film Criticism* 34, no. 2–3 (2010); Jeanine Teodorescu and Anca Munteanu, “Lăză-

One of the starkest features that distinguish the Romanian case from the Bulgarian (but also from other East European countries) is not merely the way the events of 1989 occurred (bloody and violent) but also the way in which they are described. Despite all the confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity around 1989, it is referred to in Romania as a revolution. This can be qualified as authentic or true versus inauthentic and confiscated, or even as a *refolution*, but these are all derivatives of revolution.³⁷ Compare this to the matter-of-fact and anodyne Bulgarian word *promenite*, meaning “the changes” or the German *die Wende*.

Part VI focuses on the events that have become central in the two countries and explores to what extent the remembrance of these events inflects the memory of the whole system. Dragoș Petrescu describes the major interpretations that emerged in Romania and explains the hegemony and durability of the theory that posits that the revolution was hijacked to the dissatisfaction of the educated urban strata with the immediate outcome of the revolution. It is the particular political context of the early 1990s that explains the persistence of the hegemonic narrative focusing exclusively on prisons, surveillance, and shortages. Interestingly, it is only in the last decade that a more nuanced and self-ironic interpretation comes to the fore, mostly from among the ranks of a new generation of young filmmakers.

Cristina Petrescu continues this line of reasoning by analyzing the views of what she calls the three generations of 1945, 1968, and 1989. Acutely aware of the dangers of lumping together people simply because of their age, she carefully reconstructs the sociopolitical context of the times in which these generations were socialized, as well as their characteristics: the huge heterogeneity of the first generation with living prewar memories; the second generation, many members of which embraced hopefully the Romanian version of communism in the 1960s thus turning the Romanian Communist Party into a mass organization of four million people (a fact easily suppressed in today’s hegemonic narrative), to be finally bitterly disillusioned by the final Ceaușescu decade; and the third generation which harbors only existential memories of childhood and adolescence and produces narratives without guilt in its prime venue, the Internet. Even more importantly, the Internet has facilitated the creation of a collective memory and identity.

rescu, Come Forth!’: Cristi Puiu and the Miracle of Romanian Cinema,” *Film Criticism* 34, no. 2–3 (2010); Christina Stojanova and Dana Duma, “The New Romanian Cinema between the Tragic and the Ironic,” *Film International* 10, no. 1 (January 2012); Anonymous, “The Romanian Miracle,” *Film Intelligence* (n.d.), <http://www.filmintelligence.org/romanian-miracle.htm>.

³⁷ The one small exception is former members of the Securitate who insist on an international conspiracy.

While 22 December 1989, for all the conflicting views and passions, is still considered a pivotal date in Romania, this is not even remotely possible for its Bulgarian counterpart: 10 November 1989. On the other hand, 9 September 1944, the day of the socialist revolution, or alternatively the *coup d'état* unleashing the Red Terror, continued to be a contested date over the last two decades. As Nikolai Vukov shows in his overview of the meanings and activities around this day, it remains one of the most challenging grounds to accommodate notions of “collective memory.” It is not a split merely between political elites but reflects a deep divide in the public sphere grounded in the ongoing debate about Bulgarian fascism and antifascism. It is only recently with the withering memories of generations with lived experience that the date begins slowly to fade into indifference and maybe oblivion. The other event from the communist era that propelled Bulgaria from relative obscurity to worldwide attention was the infamous renaming process of the Bulgarian Turks in the latter half of the 1980s, which arguably contributed powerfully to the demise of the regime. In her very detailed and carefully investigated chapter on the so-called “revival process,” Evgenia Kalinova provides a definitive overview of the changing political context, groups, and their motives, as well as different venues in which the remembrance of this event takes place. Unlike 9 September 1944, which is becoming safely removed in time, the “revival process” continues to be a lively and divisive topic of debate.

All of the contributions in this volume illustrate the interplay between different types of memory and the politics of memory. They also stress the role of lived experience stemming from similar trajectories but producing different memories. Written by contemporaries, eyewitnesses, and participants in the events and processes described, these essays attempt to convey the dynamism of the encounter between personal recollections, the communicative shaping of collective memories, and their encounters with the politics of memory.

2. Experts with a Cause: A Future for GDR History beyond Memory Governance and *Ostalgie* in Unified Germany

Thomas Lindenberger

GDR Sells

The revolutions that swept Europe in 1989 were unexpected, not only for historians. Their commemoration twenty years later has prompted an enormous output of publications in all formats and genres: books, DVDs, TV features, and exhibitions covering all segments of culture, from highbrow to lowbrow, state-subsidized and commercial, in the capitals and in the provinces, from academic historiography to dilettante folk art. While the exact number is difficult to verify, up to 60,000 books dealing with the German division and East Germany's past have been published in the last twenty years. The bulk of these publications is not scholarly literature, but serves a thriving market for nostalgic needs, often of the most mundane kind. The following titles may give an approximate idea: *DDR Baumaschinen 1945–1990* (GDR construction site engines); *Alles über DDR-Dampfloks* (All about GDR steam locomotives); *DDR Backbuch* (GDR baking book); *Grüße aus der DDR—777 Postkarten* (Greetings from the GDR—777 postcards); *Plaste und Elaste—Leuchtreklame in der DDR* (Plaste und Elaste: Illuminated advertising in the GDR).

There are even book series addressing different GDR age-groups by their years of birth. One can choose between: *Aufgewachsen in der DDR—Wir vom Jahrgang 1950 (or 1951, 1952,...)—Kindheit und Jugend* (Grown up in the GDR—The 1950 [1951, 1952, etc.] age-group—Childhood and youth). *1950—Ein ganz besonderer Jahrgang in der DDR* (1950—A very special age-group in the GDR). Beyond this popular culture element of media products, an impressive number of academic publications consisting of historiography and other scholarly genres (collections of documents, source editions, memoirs, and biographies) has been produced. They may not number by the tens of thousands, but certainly by the thousands, covering the events around 1989, as well as all other aspects of GDR history.

Books and other marketable formats, such as DVDs and TV productions, are only one aspect of the current attention devoted to the GDR. The events of 1989–1990 are also remembered in official ceremonies, involving many citizens, but above all the state. Dealing with the two dictatorships in German history has become a central concern in political decision making. As a result, a unique set of institutions, such as state-sponsored foundations and a landscape of memorials and archives, has been established over the last twenty years. They are part of an innovation in German governmental public policy, which I propose to designate as *memory governance*: the practice of regulating activities of dealing with the past in public spheres, sponsored or cosponsored by the government.¹

In Germany, there is an agency in the Federal Chancellery devoted to coordinating the federal activities in this field. This ministry is headed by the so-called commissioner of the federal chancellor for culture and media, who is in charge not only of central state authorities dealing with the past, such as the Federal Archives and the Stasi files authority, but also of the memorials in the different federal states which are cofinanced by the state, of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, or of the Foundation for Dealing with the Past SED Dictatorship. On the whole, vast competencies are amassed here. Twenty years ago such an institution within the West German executive branch would have been more or less unthinkable. First, the field of culture was considered a policy field pertaining only to the member states (*Bundesländer*) of the federal republic. Second, the idea of such coordinated intervention by the state seemed at odds with the principles of a liberal society.

Contemporary History as a Beneficiary of Revolution

History as a scholarly practice with its own criteria for dealing with the past stands somewhere between these two massive phenomena: the media hype around the recent past, on the one hand, and the well-established policy field seeking to deal with issues of history and memory governance, on the other. Historians have massively contributed to both, of course, and still do so through their research activities by developing new interpretations of the past, by serving as experts and members of advisory boards, by acting as public intellectuals, and, not least, by teaching future school teachers, journalists, and museologists.

¹ Thomas Lindenberger, "Governing Conflicted Memories: Some Remarks about the Regulation of History Politics in Unified Germany," in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, eds. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger, *Studies in European History and Public Spheres*, vol. 2 (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag/New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 73–87.

They are frequently asked about their opinions in public debates, mostly in order to share their expertise on specific aspects of the past, but sometimes also as public figures contributing to more general contemporary problems, such as the financial crisis, migration, the system of higher education, etc.

Some twenty years ago historians were not yet that visible, and therefore, at first glance, their increased prominence might appear an unqualified success story. At second glance, however, this constellation also puts into question the traditional role and self-understanding of history as a search for something like objective truth. Most professional historians do not consider entertaining a broader audience, or performing and assisting official state functions in a particular policy field, as the central tasks of their profession. Rather, their ethos as members of a scholarly or scientific community requires minimum autonomy from such activities, although always a relative one. Each historian will develop a personal understanding of his role in facing the challenge of being confronted with society's and the state's interest in the past. In any instance, I think it is necessary to be aware of the seminal changes which history as professional practice went through in consequence of the revolutionary events in 1989, the German unification in 1990, and the subsequent overcoming of the division of Europe. My aim in this contribution is to give an overview of how contemporary history faced these challenges between a growing demand for academic support of memory politics and the pervasive commercialization of interest in anything related to the recent past in a newly united Germany.

We historians have to ask ourselves critically: is this state of the profession becoming more and more redundant, overstretched, and superficial? Can historiography still fulfill its task as a critical instance in society or is it succumbing to a mere selling-out of its potential to two major hegemonic powers, the state and the media, and thereby undermining its very status as a scholarly practice in the long run? Can it still make a difference?

The German unification and 1989 also entailed a sort of a "professional revolution" for German historians, or more precisely, for historians of postwar Germany all over the world; this transformation has been duly termed an "archival revolution."² Almost overnight, the bulk of the documents stemming from the now defunct GDR, which had been kept in secret archives, were put at the disposal of researchers and journalists alike without any major restrictions. The traditional thirty-year rule for opening the archives, which otherwise creates a delay between production of documents and access by researchers, was not applied to the GDR documents. Of course, individual data protection always has to be accounted for, and specific rules were developed for the secret service

² Etienne François, "An Archive's Revolution and the Rewriting of History: East Germany," in *Stalinism and Nazism: History and Memory Compared*, ed. Henry Rousso (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2004), 262–80.

files.³ Otherwise, the general understanding was that there was nothing to be said against opening the internal communication and documentation of a party and state machinery which no longer existed, no longer operated, and therefore could not claim any interest in having its secrets protected.

At the same time, a strong interest in the past of the GDR emerged on all levels of state and society. As a result, history and the social sciences were encouraged as expert communities to seize the opportunity to make a difference and increase their cultural capital. The very synchronicity of the opening of *all* kinds of archives was crucial in this process. Everything became accessible more or less at the same time within one or two years: the party archives, the archives of the mass organizations, as well as of state institutions, including the notorious secret police, the Stasi. This took place at all levels of the former state structure of the GDR: at the central level of the Federal Republic, as well as the medium and local levels of communities. Although the collections of documents are not complete to the same extent across all levels and all branches of state and party organizations, they contain so much overlapping and cross-referencing material, that they complement each other to a very high degree.

This situation provoked a sort of gold rush in the scholarly community. Within a few years after 1990, several hundred research projects dealing with GDR history were launched in Germany alone. A famous index listed more than 800 in 1994.⁴ Research was conducted by scholars at all kinds of institutions, but mainly at universities and at new research institutes dedicated to the research of the GDR, such as the Hannah Arendt Institute for Research on Totalitarianism in Dresden, the joint research group on the SED dictatorship established at the Free University in Berlin, a new Berlin outpost of the Munich-based Institute for Contemporary History, and the Centre for Contemporary History, an interdisciplinary research institute based in Potsdam.

Political decision making played a crucial role in enhancing these research interests by providing public funding for such projects. One of the fundamental preconditions enabling this spectacular advancement of contemporary history was the widespread consensus that confrontation with the past should start without any delay and in all realms of public life. Policies of transitional justice

³ Reiner Schiller-Dickhut, ed., *The European Network of Official Authorities in Charge of the Secret-Police Files: A Reader on Their Legal Foundations, Structures and Activities* (Berlin: Die Bundesbeauftragte für die Unterlagen des Staatssicherheitsdienstes der Ehemaligen Dt. Demokratischen Republik, 2009), http://www.bstu.bund.de/cln_012/nn_712564/DE/Publikationen/BF-Publikationen/Netzwerk__Reader,templateId=raw,property=publicationFile.pdf/Netzwerk__Reader.pdf.

⁴ Thomas Heimann et al., *Forschungsprojekte zur DDR Geschichte. Ergebnisse einer Umfrage des Arbeitsbereiches DDR-Geschichte im Mannheimer Zentrum für europäische Sozialforschung (MZES) der Universität Mannheim* (Bonn: Enquete-Kommission des Deutschen Bundestages, 1994).

in a wider sense included the prosecution of crimes committed by the communist state, the large-scale restitution of private property, compensations for political persecutions, and the vetting of personnel in the public sector, including teachers and professors. The rigor and consistency with which this process was carried out was in large part due to the experience of West Germany's previous failures in confronting its Nazi past. For about two decades after 1945, dealing openly and self-critically with this legacy had been avoided by a large part of West German society, both among the elites and the population at large. The young generation of intellectuals of the 1960s and 1970s vociferously criticized this. Many of them had attained leading positions by the 1980s, and now, faced with the immediate remnants of the second German dictatorship, they wanted to do better. This time "working through the past" (*Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit*)⁵ was to be pursued differently. Due to broad social concern and heavy governmental involvement, these new policies could be swiftly implemented, and were largely based on an individualistic notion of human rights favored by West German intellectuals and government officials.

Although these policies never lacked a minimum consensus among the political elite and in society more generally, their implementation was far from harmonious. Heated controversies and legal disputes were accepted as intrinsic to the process, and such policies were not just a matter of bureaucratic formalities and the due process of law, but were also replete with emotions from indignation and frustration to satisfaction and triumphalism. In particular, parliaments both on the federal and regional levels played a crucial role in establishing this pluralistic practice. During the 1990s several "*enquête* commissions" were created to hear testimonies about the GDR past, and then to deliver majority and minority opinions. These commissions comprised experts from different scientific and political backgrounds, victims of repression, and politicians from both West Germany and the former GDR.

The Triumphant Comeback of "Totalitarianism" and Its Fallacies

This is not the place to debate the content and themes of all the statements in these commissions, delivered mainly during the first half of the 1990s. However, one important component has to be highlighted because it played a crucial

⁵ Martin Sabrow, "The Post-Heroic Memory Society: Models of Historical Narration in the Present," in *Clashes in European Memory: The Case of Communist Repression and the Holocaust*, eds. Muriel Blaive, Christian Gerbel, and Thomas Lindenberger, *Studies in European History and Public Spheres*, vol. 2 (Innsbruck: StudienVerlag/New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2011), 88–98.

role in how academic historiography developed later on: these public debates caused the totalitarianism theory to become the dominant paradigm in interpreting and understanding the GDR past. Consequently, particular emphasis was put on the structure of the party, the state, and its most prominent representatives. Political histories were privileged at the expense of histories of society and everyday life. In particular, the history of repression and persecution of opposition movements, as well as the activities of political opponents, were stressed, while little attention was paid to the actions and experiences of “ordinary” GDR citizens.

In the realm of historical research proper, however, the picture was more heterogeneous. First of all, historians in general had always been a bit reserved as to the suitability of the totalitarianism paradigm to historical research in a strict sense, and also with regard to National Socialism. It should be noted that the totalitarianism theory had been developed within the fields of political philosophy and political science to describe very general features of certain types of regimes in an abstract sense. Moreover, its formulation had predated any “archival revolutions” allowing for empirically based judgment. In particular, its focus on political history and on the actions of states and parties was widely contested.

Second, since the whole community of historians was involved, the inner pluralism and differentiation within this community soon became apparent when time came to historicize the GDR. Besides political history, approaches like social and cultural history began to settle in this new area of research. Here, it is useful to keep in mind that the West German historians, entering the field of GDR history at the beginning of the 1990s, could look back on several waves of theoretical and methodological innovation, in particular with regard to research on nineteenth- and twentieth-century German history, including the history of Nazism and its roots in the German Empire and the Weimar Republic. Refined methods of social sciences and cultural studies had already been established as part of scholarly practice, forming a multifaceted landscape of competing schools and approaches, such as the famous Bielefeld school of historical social research, or their critics, the proponents of *Alltagsgeschichte* (history of everyday life), which had considerably enlarged the scope of social history. Especially in the field of contemporary history, research techniques such as oral history had proven particularly productive.

Astonishingly, from the 1990s onwards, historians of earlier periods—early modern history, the German Empire, the Weimar Republic or National Socialism, etc.—all took part in researching the East German state which had just left behind an enormous amount of relatively well-ordered archives. It quickly became evident that the totalitarianism approach, at least the sometimes blatantly simplified versions of it circulating at that time, would not yield a sufficiently complex understanding of this recent past. One major criticism was that the

totalitarian paradigm is derived from the comparison of Nazi rule, including its genocidal extermination policies, to Stalinism, with its repression, terror, and mass murder. The postwar state socialist regimes, however, were marked by a lower degree of violence and a higher degree of inner cohesion and stability, especially in the post-Stalin period. Their societies had gone through substantial structural changes, such as technical modernization and moderate reforms, and ultimately a democratic transformation—something which had been categorically ruled out as a possibility in the totalitarianism approach. The totalitarianism theory finds considerable support when applied to the intentions of communist regimes, and it can, therefore, be a valuable source of conceptual inspiration. However, it could not account for these more recent dynamics and transformations, which both enabled the communist regimes of this region to maintain stability over several decades, and which, at the same time, contributed to their demise and transformation.

In addition, the totalitarian paradigm restricted the way in which the experience of dictatorship could be communicated in public: its rhetoric of clear-cut black and white, good and bad, oppressors and repressed, failed to address the sensibilities of those people who saw themselves as not belonging neatly to any category, and who refused to devalue their life experience under communism in the name of a specific view on history. Depicting life in the GDR as exclusively marked by state terror, party ideology, and economic failures contradicted the actual recollections of those who had nevertheless managed to lead a decent life under communism and who were now looking back on having experienced a relatively happy childhood, learned a profession, built a family, and achieved success while avoiding too much trouble with the party/state. These citizens would not understand why such experiences had to be totally depreciated by painting them in the dark colors of dictatorship, repression, and illegitimacy. Many GDR citizens felt as if the rhetoric of totalitarianism wanted to make them believe that their lives under socialism had amounted to a waste of time, and that, as a society, they had achieved nothing to be proud of.

In contrast to the totalitarian paradigm, social and cultural history approaches, and in particular those focusing on the history of everyday life, were taking these sensibilities much more seriously. Oral histories, for instance, could reconstruct the trajectories of concrete persons through the different phases of the GDR's existence and show how individuals—by adapting to the regime's coercion while keeping their own sense of life, their *Eigen-Sinn*—managed not to become anonymous little wheels in the state machinery. This added to a deeper understanding of how the system as such could have worked without resorting permanently to open and direct violence. Consequently, such approaches broadened the understanding of the GDR as a historical phenomenon.

Thematizing the microlevel of social relations and lifeworlds also had a political relevance beyond scholarly debates: it addressed the experience and rec-

ollections of a much larger part of the former GDR citizenry than a narrower political history, which would only have focused on political elites and their few outspoken opponents. In a certain way, the history of everyday life had a more democratic appeal.

From the outset such approaches provoked sharp criticism. They were accused of belittling communist rule and of denying or relativizing the repressive side of communism.⁶ Indeed, if research on the GDR past would have been reduced to stories about seemingly “nonpolitical subjects,” such as family life, tourism, and consumption, it would have remained a social history with the politics left out. I contend that, indeed, some practitioners of cultural or micro-history sometimes went too far in focusing exclusively on so-called niches while neglecting the synchronicity of political repression and utterly “unpolitical” lives. In the long run, however, this did not establish itself as the prevailing perspective. On the contrary, the social history of the GDR proved to be replete with politics, since historians of East German society could evade neither politics nor the presence of the state.

Several theoretical concepts were proposed in order to account for this. One focused on the *Durchherrsung* of society, meaning the thorough state/party penetration of all social relations down to the level of family life and personal relations.⁷ Another strove to find out how far the dictatorship could actually go in structuring people’s lives, whether there were practical *limits* to this penetration of society (*Grenzen der Diktatur*).⁸ Yet another approach, proposed by myself, picked up a basic tenet of totalitarianism, namely the assumption that civil society in the strict sense of the word, as an autonomous sphere of interactions typical for modern societies, could not exist under communist rule. This approach zooms in on the microlevel of societal relations and comes to the conclusion that civil society *existed* under communist rule, though only in localized fragments and nonautonomous subentities such as work brigades, local neighborhoods, or the family clan. Any forms of higher aggregates of societal organization, based on supraindividual, or basically uncensored public commu-

⁶ See, for instance, the debates following the publication of a report by the so-called “Sabrow-Kommission” pleading for the inclusion of *Alltagsgeschichte* approaches into GDR-related memory politics of the FRG. The report and the reactions to it are documented in Martin Sabrow et al., eds., *Wohin treibt die DDR-Erinnerung? Dokumentation einer Debatte* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2007).

⁷ Jürgen Kocka, “Eine durchherrschte Gesellschaft,” in *Die Sozialgeschichte der DDR*, eds. Hartmut Kaelble et al. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1994), 547–43; Alf Lütke, “‘Helden der Arbeit’. Mühen beim Arbeiten. Zur mißmutigen Loyalität von Industriearbeitern in der DDR,” *ibid.*, 188–216.

⁸ Richard Bessel and Ralph Jessen, “Einleitung. Die Grenzen der Diktatur,” in *Die Grenzen der Diktatur. Staat und Gesellschaft in der DDR*, ed. Richard Bessel (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 7–24.

nication and integration, however, were prevented from coming into existence by the rigorous limitations imposed on any form of civil society practice. I therefore proposed to label this type of regime a *dictatorship of limits/borders* (*Diktatur der Grenze[n]*).⁹

***The Lives of Others* vs. *Good Bye, Lenin!* Or How to Bridge the Gap**

The social and cultural history approaches, it has to be underlined, never monopolized the field of memory history; they merely contributed to its pluralization. Meanwhile, this pluralism of approaches and historiographical schools is basically acknowledged by all players involved, both in the academic and political spheres. Nevertheless, incompatibilities persist, such as the gap between research topics on repression and political opposition, and the lifeworld of the average GDR citizen. I will illustrate this by evoking the two most successful movies about the GDR, which are also internationally well known: *The Lives of Others* (*Das Leben der Anderen*, dir. Florian Henckel von Donnersmarck, 2006) and *Good Bye, Lenin!* (dir. Wolfgang Becker, 2003).¹⁰

The Lives of Others is the story of a secret service officer who goes through a protracted process of conversion: instead of carrying out a persecution mission against a well-known dissident playwright, he protects the latter by suppressing material evidence, most visibly by putting away a typewriter just before the police search the playwright's apartment. I do not want to go into the numerous details of this story—the love story between the playwright and his girlfriend who works for the secret service, the demotion of the officer and his indirect but hidden rehabilitation after the downfall of communism—all this would lead us too far away from historiography and into the midst of film studies.

What is important, however, is that the social setting of the story is consistently limited to two antagonistic social fields: the party-state and its political police, on the one hand, and the community of oppositional or dissident intellectuals and artists in downtown Berlin, on the other. The reality of the East German dictatorship is shown as if it basically consisted only of these two small opposed groups, the one persecuting the other. Society at large plays no role in this narrative, or is only involved in very short episodes which do not play an important role in the plot.

When this film premiered in 2006, it was received with enthusiasm, in particular by those engaged in official memory politics: former dissidents, politicians, the

⁹ Thomas Lindenberger, "The Fragmented Society: 'Societal Activism' and Authority in FDR State Socialism," *Zeitgeschichte* 37 (2010): 3–20.

¹⁰ Thomas Lindenberger, "Gewalt und Wahrheit: Verkehrte Welt in *Good Bye, Lenin!*," *WerkstattGeschichte* 37 (2004): 101–14.

ones responsible for promulgating the antitotalitarian reading of GDR history as it had been formulated in the first instance during the 1990s when the new governance of memory in unified Germany was developed. Interestingly enough, historians and members of the film community itself were a bit more critical, although in general *The Lives of Others* was acknowledged as a deeply moving melodrama created with a high level of artistic craftsmanship. The film received particularly wide support from audiences in West Germany. It was advanced as an antidote to the far more popular film preceding it by three years, *Good Bye, Lenin!*, which was accused of treating the communist past in a purely nostalgic, unserious way.

As some of you may remember, *Good Bye, Lenin!* is a story about a mother-son drama. In 1990, a man in his early twenties reconstructs the perished world of consumer objects of the defunct GDR at home in order to spare his convalescent mother the shock of the sudden change from communism to capitalism, which she had not witnessed because she had fallen into a coma during the revolution of 1989. This story of a restaged fake GDR lifeworld evoked notions of everyday life in the GDR in which political repression was more or less absent. In all fairness, it must be said that the opening scene and a subsequent flashback clearly show the repressive character of the GDR, but the key story of *Good Bye, Lenin!* revolves around a retrospective vision of GDR life in which the political is conspicuously absent—and for a lot of people, it was obviously these reminiscences that made the film so popular and that gave it the character of a vehicle for so-called *Ostalgie*—nostalgic feelings for a lost world of modest affluence and relative security.

I consider both films valuable enactments and visualizations of salient historical problems of East German life, although historians could easily point out inaccuracies and misrepresentations of historical facts in either. But since these are stories told to entertain broad audiences and not to please professional historians, I can easily gloss over such qualms and come to the symptomatic void to which they point if we look at them together: there are simply no studies (not to speak of popular movies) as yet about how political control and society at large interacted on an everyday basis. We know a lot about dissidents and their persecutors, on the one hand, and about normal life of ordinary people seemingly far away from official politics, on the other hand, but very little on how, for instance, the state security and party functionaries also intervened in the lives of people who were not dissidents, that is, how authority was executed below the level of systematic repression and tight control.

This concerns in particular the degree of societal awareness of the Stasi and the party in everyday life; it concerns the importance of denunciation and lack of solidarity among people having trouble with authority; it also deals with the control system at large and the participation of the population in it on a more or less voluntary basis. Some initial research in this realm is now conducted at the research department of the Stasi file agency in Berlin, but on the whole such

research projects are just beginning. Hopefully they can serve to bridge the gap between the two perspectives I characterized so far.

The “goal” of experts in this exploration of the past would consist mainly in critically engaging nostalgia—as represented, for instance, in the examples of book titles I gave in the beginning—but doing so without resorting to a script of GDR history, which reduces the latter to political repression against a minority of opponents and nonconformists. Of course this *Ostalgie* is an ambivalent and very amorphous thing. Only in a few instances is it clearly connected with a longing for bringing the old system back—even nowadays, when capitalism is showing its dark sides again. Generally, *Ostalgie* nostalgia is about insisting on the notion that East Germans have an identity of their own which is based on having lived in this specific part of divided Germany under a set of very specific conditions, and on selectively integrating the positive experiences from this lifeworld into present-day worldviews, while recognizing that the institutional framework of this lifeworld has perished. By itself, this is quite a natural attitude, not necessarily detrimental to a democratic political culture. Debates should therefore not focus on whether this should be tolerated or not, but on how it should be addressed when it comes to the politics of history, surfacing in educational activities and other popular formats of representing the past.

Social and cultural history have the advantage of addressing this sensibility seriously, without necessarily paying tribute to its harmonizing and idealizing intentions. They were and still are able to profit, at least to some extent, from this interest, although their success was due mostly to increasing inner-academic recognition. Nevertheless, if we maintain the assumption that professional historiography, when communicating with a larger audience (and not just within academic circles), is always driven by a motivation of enlightenment (*Aufklärung*), then we can see that the purpose of expertise clearly lies in contributing to a more self-critical and also nonelitist notion of the GDR past.

More than a Footnote in World History: The GDR and Its Potential for Transnational Comparison

In order to explain the success of this wider approach to GDR history as it is currently established, one further factor has to be taken into account: its internationality. The internationalization of German history, in particular the strong and sustained Anglo-Saxon interest in German contemporary history, is one of the outcomes of the Second World War. In an effort to understand the origins of National Socialism, British and North American universities had produced many highly qualified historians holding leading positions in this thematic field. So it was no wonder that these academic communities immediately joined the GDR gold rush once the new archives were opened.

In contrast to their German colleagues, however, they were much less exposed to the influences and turning tides of an emerging politics of history and were on the whole much more open to a broader version of GDR history, based on more recent trends in cultural studies. In particular, American colleagues did not hesitate, for instance, to compare the GDR not just directly with the Nazi regime (which turned out not to be so productive after all) but also to its West German rival, which, particularly during the 1990s, was more or less considered taboo within the German scholarly community.

A case in point is Uta Poiger's pioneering study, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels*, on rock and roll youth cultures in both German states in the 1950s and 1960s.¹¹ This book contributed enormously to transcending simplified notions of contrasts and differences between East and West Germany. As heirs to German authoritarian tradition, elites in both parts of Germany at first sternly rejected the Americanization of youth culture, before each state developed specific ways to domesticate this new development. This subject has been picked up in a lot of other examples, as well as in other societies under communism, and played an important role in establishing new approaches in the German context.¹²

In addition, contemporary German history has become a rather popular research subject among younger French historians. This represents a novelty insofar as historical research in France had rarely been engaged with German contemporary history (apart from the history of the German occupation of France, of course). In the case of this recent interest in the GDR, the intense relationship of French intellectuals and society in general with communism during the 1950s and 1960s played a crucial role. As a beneficial side effect, French–German exchange among historians has been broadened,¹³ and, more importantly, some of the highly meritorious approaches of the French scholarly tradition, such as the “history of mentalities” (*histoire des mentalités*) from within the Annales school, the “social history of politics” (*socio-histoire du politique*), and concepts derived from the French tradition of social anthropology (Marcel Mauss) have been applied with considerable success to the case of the GDR. This endeavor is up to now best represented by Sandrine Kott's seminal study of everyday life in East German enterprises.¹⁴

¹¹ Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

¹² See, most recently, Heiner Stahl, *Jugendradio im kalten Ätherkrieg. Berlin als eine Klanglandschaft des Pop 1962–1973* (Berlin: Landbeck Edition Gehirnstrom, 2010).

¹³ See the program of *Pratiques Politiques Communistes en Europe occidentale et dans les Démocraties Populaires/Politische Praxis kommunistischer Parteien in Westeuropa und den Volksdemokratien*, Paris, 21 and 22 May 2007.

¹⁴ Sandrine Kott, *Le communisme au quotidien. Les entreprises d'État dans la société est-allemande (1949–1989)* (Paris: Belin, 2001).

Finally, I would like to mention a third dimension coming into play when the East German dictatorship is looked upon by “outsiders.” The recent work of Mary Fulbrook has contributed very much to a renewal of debates on how “normal” everyday life supposedly was in the GDR, and whether people really attributed something like “normality” to their social existence there.¹⁵ I for myself am not very happy with this term, but this is not the appropriate place to elaborate on this.¹⁶ Suffice it to say that Fulbrook’s generally productive perspective is informed by yet another angle: her reading of everyday life in the GDR is very much predicated on her perception of the GDR as a very ambitious welfare state project, at least at its best times (that is, during the late 1960s and in particular during the 1970s, or the early years under Erich Honecker). In several instances in her important study on “The People’s State,” the experience of the lost British welfare state leaks through as a hidden agenda behind this interest in the GDR. It would have served Fulbrook’s arguments better had she revealed this hidden transcript of her narrative in much more explicit terms. In any case, Fulbrook’s work shows how the increasing transnationalization of research perspectives can contribute to transcending sterile and sometimes self-serving oppositions between dictatorship and democracy.

It is precisely this international perspective that is the future of the historiography of the GDR. This applies, of course, also to comparisons with the other countries of the so-called communist block on all aspects of economic, social, cultural, political, etc., history I have mentioned so far. But it should be kept in mind that it is not limited to that. In the context of broader European and global history, integration in the broader perspective of the twentieth century is crucial. Jürgen Kocka aroused quite a controversy some years ago when he warned the community of GDR researchers not to reduce their interest to the GDR proper, because within a few years they would risk becoming specialists of a small footnote in world history.¹⁷

I can only support this view: I think that the high standards of methodology and theoretical approaches developed so far in researching this very specific case of a communist dictatorship can only be maintained and rendered fruitful

¹⁵ See the following by Mary Fulbrook: *The People’s State: East Germany Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2008); “The Concept of ‘Normalisation’ and the GDR in Comparative Perspective,” in *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979: The ‘Normalisation of Rule’?*, ed. Mary Fulbrook (New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), 1–32; “‘Normalisation’ in the GDR in Retrospect: East German Perspectives on Their Own Lives,” *ibid.*, 278–319.

¹⁶ See Thomas Lindenberger, “Normality, Utopia, Memory, and Beyond: Reassembling the East German Society,” *German Historical Institute London Bulletin* 33, no. 1 (2011): 67–91.

¹⁷ Jürgen Kocka, “Bilanz und Perspektiven der DDR-Forschung. Hermann Weber zum 75. Geburtstag,” *Deutschland Archiv* 36 (2003): 764–69.

by comparative and transnational perspectives.¹⁸ The historiography on the GDR can also be seen as a model case of what can be gained by a consistent denationalization of historiography, by making the interest in and the thorough research of the past of a country an open space for mutual intellectual and cultural influences, an example for how it is possible to profit from a broad cultural and intellectual diversity transcending the borders of intellectual and disciplinary conventions. The country might have been small and on the whole rather insignificant compared to the “big players” surrounding it. More or less accidentally it had to play an indispensable link in the chain of events that ended the captivity of the “Other Europe,” and thereby opened an era of renewal of democracy in Europe. If seen from this transnational angle, even the tiny GDR, and the peculiar ways in which its past is dealt with, will be remembered as more than a footnote in world history.¹⁹

¹⁸ Thomas Lindenberger and Martin Sabrow, “Das Findelkind der Zeitgeschichte. Zwischen Verinselung und Europäisierung: Die Zukunft der DDR-Geschichte,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 12 November 2003, reprint in *Deutschland Archiv* 37 (2004): 123–27.

¹⁹ Thomas Lindenberger, “What’s in This Footnote? World History!,” *Bulletin of the German Historical Institute* 46 (2010): 27–32.

3. The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism: From Autobiographical Recollections to Collective Representations

Cristina Petrescu and Dragoş Petrescu

According to the conventional knowledge developed in the West during the Cold War, Romania was more often than not an exception, at odds not only with the Soviet Union, but also with the other satellites. From a country envied by the “fraternal” states and applauded by the opposite camp because of its re-orientation toward the West in the 1960s, Romania turned by the end of the 1980s into a discredited dictatorship with a rotten economy and the lowest living standards in Europe, with the possible exception of Albania. At the time when perestroika and glasnost stirred the winds of change throughout the Eastern bloc, Romania became an autarchic communist polity, resisting any structural transformation. Although the population endured in silence under the regime—critical attitudes and civic initiatives by opposition groups in Romania were the least significant when compared to such actions in the other countries of Eastern Europe—communism collapsed during the same “miraculous year.” With the unexpected revolution in December, Romanians witnessed the passing of a historical epoch without having much knowledge about it. Memory-based dissident versions of postwar historical events, overlooked or misinterpreted in official narratives, appeared long before 1989 in those countries in the Eastern bloc where structured opposition developed. In communist Romania, given the absence of noticeable civil society nuclei, only some family circles preserved the memory of the forbidden past. Thus, no alternative narratives to the official version of the postwar history emerged from inside the country, while those articulated outside remained largely inaccessible.

If Romanians did not know until 1989 how to make sense of their past under communism,¹ looking retrospectively twenty years later, one can observe the

¹ There are interesting differences among the former communist countries with regard to the use of concepts such as “socialism” or “communism” in reference to the pre-1989 past. In some countries, such as Bulgaria, the term “socialism” prevailed in public use, even after 1989. This term was the self-referential definition of the “old regimes,” which considered that they had al-

emergence, dominance, and persistence of a unique reading of this past, detectible in all public representations: the communist period was the darkest epoch in national history. The local version of communism represented no less than the most inhumane dictatorship in the Soviet bloc. In all countries of the former Eastern Europe, such reactions emerged immediately after 1989, as the propaganda-driven narratives about the impressive postwar achievements under communism were unanimously dismissed as an enormous lie and, in reaction, turned into their opposite. However, public debates on the pre-1989 past took place, especially after personal recollections—many of them expressing nostalgia—counterbalanced this initial societal response. Moreover, professionals relying on thorough research, fresh theoretical insights, and reelaborated methodologies gradually refined the premises of understanding the past. In Romania, there have been no controversies over the past, but a canonization of the above-mentioned ideas on Romanian communism, reiterated in all publicly articulated reconstructions of the past, from personal recollections to professional writings, and from museum exhibitions to cinematic narratives. What are the sources of this post-1989 enduring public consensus on the communist past? It did not originate in the feeble pre-1989 anticommunist dissident discourse, but above all in the personal lived experiences of those who outlived Romanian communism. During the 1980s, regardless of age, education level, or social status, Romanians—except for the members of the privileged party *nomenklatura* and the leadership of the secret police—shared the experience of deep shortages that not only perverted daily routines, but also destroyed social bonds and civil behavior. Because the failure of the communist welfare project was so much more obvious in this country than anywhere else, the gap between the memory of the recent past and the discourse of the former regime on that past was also much higher than elsewhere. These lived experiences—that represented almost the opposite of every pre-1989 official statement about the communist rule—have been at the origin of the quasi-unanimous post-1989 negative remembrance of communism.

A wide agreement on the interpretation of communism was easily reached because the largest majority of Romanians' private memories and lived experi-

ready reached the stage of development defined as socialist by Karl Marx, while communism still lay ahead as a goal to be reached in the future. In other countries, among them Romania, post-1989 public discourses adopted the term "communism" to refer to the pre-1989 period. Employed until 1989 in Western literature and media with reference to the countries where the political order was based on the rule of a single Communist Party, this term entered public use mostly under the influence of foreign broadcasting agencies with services in the local languages, such as Radio Free Europe or Voice of America. This terminological ambiguity lies in the works of Marx himself, who employed "communism" to designate either "a political movement of the working class" or "a form of society which the working class, through its struggle, would bring into existence" (Tom Bottomore et al., eds., *A Dictionary of Marxist Thought* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1991], 103–5).

ences converged toward it. Yet, this large societal consensus persisted publicly because the controversies surrounding Romania's break with communism and its subsequent transition to democracy continuously reinforced it. Romanians gained their freedom in 1989 due to an unexpected, confusing, and bloody revolution that claimed the lives of more than a thousand people and resulted in the hasty execution of Nicolae Ceaușescu and his wife, solely held responsible for leading their country into disaster. Twenty years later, while the fall of communism was celebrated everywhere, the anniversary of the events in December 1989 went almost unnoticed in Romania. What must have been a major event in recent national history has remained to this day an enigma. Fierce controversies still abound over crucial questions: What was the catalyst for the popular revolt? Who was responsible for the death of so many Romanian citizens? And most importantly: What was the true nature of the political changes that occurred in the aftermath of the December 1989 events? In short, Romania's break with communism has been generally perceived as incomplete, and therefore in constant need of being fulfilled. Such popular perception was further strengthened after the electoral success of the lower-ranking *nomenklatura*, which assured their control of the transition to democracy for six years. This situation generated a durable societal cleavage between communists and anticommunists that not only shaped the postcommunist political spectrum, but also structured the emerging civil society. To this day, it continues to influence public discourses, patterns of civic mobilization, and voting behavior. More importantly, due to this contested break with communism, anticommunism became synonymous with democratization.

As the regime change was marked by too much continuity, the purge of the human remnants of this past was considered a fundamental precondition for democratization. As lustration was long postponed, and then perceived as inconsistently applied, the memory of the crimes of communism was turned into a substitute for transitional justice. In this context of a protracted exit from communism, the public representation of the recent past has become intrinsically linked to a political and civic project aiming to emphasize the criminal dimension of the former regime, its illegitimacy, and its disregard for human rights. Professional reconstructions of the past have been—consciously or less so—also subordinated to this project, which has been envisaged as a substitute for the never-staged but continuously expected “Nuremberg of communism.” This widely assumed postcommunist anticommunist societal project has become the basis of the hegemonic and long-lasting collective representation of the recent past. Any alternative visions expressed in the public sphere were discarded and have remained marginal. According to this representation, Romania experienced under the dark period of communism a detour from its “natural” development. Moreover, this happened under the lead of a power elite that was ill-intentioned (because it defended mostly the interests of the Soviet Union), un-

dereducated (because it proved unfit to fulfill its tasks), and, above all, illegitimate (because it turned against its own citizens instead of acting in support of their well-being). Obviously, such an interpretation placed the responsibility for past wrongdoings only on the former *nomenklatura* members and their secret police acolytes. At the same time, it victimized the large mass of the population and absolved it of any contribution to the perpetuation of the system, overlooking the control mechanisms that relied on the wide-scale collaboration and the consent of the Romanians, which the former regime gradually developed. This hegemonic public representation might serve the purpose of emphasizing the criminal dimension of the communist regime, but it distorts the reconstruction of the recent past.

In sum, a national communism that hardly matched others, that collapsed in an exceptional way, and resulted in an atypical transition to democracy, could not generate but a peculiar pattern of collective representation. This chapter seeks to capture the process of formulating this prevailing representation. The first part—mapping autobiographical recollections—addresses personal memories and defines the major groups that publicly remembered their lived experiences. Remembering is a process that always takes place in sociocultural contexts. In other words, the process of making sense of one's past is not individual, but collective. What each person recalls or forgets from his or her past is, consciously or not, inevitably shaped by external influences, ranging from interaction within social groups to exposure to various media. Consequently, this part examines the corpus of memoirs, diaries, interviews, and occasional recollections that were made public, classifies them according to the social group of their author, defines the main message conveyed by each group, and evaluates the potential impact. In short, it analyzes what some Romanians actually wanted to remember from their personal past in order to share it with others.

The second part—shaping collective representations—illustrates the directions in which institutions and organizations, as well as individuals—professionals or nonprofessionals—channeled their interest in the memory of communism. It shows which personal memories were included in the public representations of the past, and how historical writings used such memories. If the first part refers to memory as a cognitive psychological process, the second addresses memory metaphorically. Accordingly, it discusses the process involving media, institutions, and civil society groups that have participated in the construction of a shared past with the aim of preserving it for future generations. Such a process resembles to a certain extent that of individual remembering, which is also dynamic and selective, and always accompanied by its complementary process—forgetting. However, it does not refer to what Romanian society literally remembers, but to the process of selecting from the communist past what it considers worthy of remembering. This process of organizing the memory of the past in turn influences the subsequent autobiographical testimo-

nies. In other words, there is a constant and mutual interaction between personal recollections and memory-based public representations, historical writings included.² These mutually influencing processes of remembrance have gradually crystallized in the public sphere a hegemonic and long-lasting collective representation of Romanian communism that forgets more than it remembers by emphasizing suffering, exaggerating heroism, and externalizing guilt. Such a public representation corresponds to an understanding of this past shared by all institutions and individuals engaged in preserving its memory, but it fails to embody the multitude of personal experiences under communism, perpetuating a gap between private and public versions of the past.

Carriers of Memory: Mapping Autobiographical Recollections

Until 1989 there were no attempts at collecting and disseminating testimonies that would have conveyed to future generations the history that was not taught in schools. Eyewitness accounts that would contradict the official narrative of the communist period were not preserved because, as mentioned, opposition networks capable of undertaking such a task did not exist. Besides, communist Romania did not experience events of paramount significance—such as the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring, or the series of Polish revolts that culminated with the birth of Solidarity—that could have acted as catalysts for the preservation of alternative memories. Consequently, the past censored by the party-state remained unknown to the large majority of Romanians until 1989. Yet, even in this rather “eventless” country, the largest majority of individuals were aware—in one way or another—that conflicting versions of this past coexisted. First, since the history of the post-1945 epoch was continuously rewritten according to the changing political priorities of the ruling elite, its last official interpretation—especially with regard to the communist takeover or the Stalinist period—differed from previous variants, which older generations remembered. Moreover, official accounts of events such as the collectivization of

² Using the concepts proposed by Aleida Assmann, one might say that the first part corresponds to the archives of remembering, i.e., the repository of the reference memory of the communist past, while the second to the canon of remembering, which turns reference memory into working memory. The latter implies a process of selecting those memories to which value is attributed and which are thus destined to be preserved for future generations. As a whole, this chapter aims, in the terms coined by Jan Assmann, at capturing the transition from autobiographical and communicative memory to cultural memory. This presupposes the crossing of the boundary between “embodied and mediated forms of memory.” See Aleida Assmann, “Canon and Archive,” and Jan Assmann, “Communicative and Cultural Memory,” in *Media and Cultural Memory/Medien und kulturelle Erinnerung*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 97–118.

agriculture contradicted commonsense thinking in Romania: no one really believed that peasants could have ever willingly given up their land, all the more that the communist historical narrative itself otherwise emphasized their centuries-long fight for a plot of land they could call their own.³ Other events of the immediate past, such as working-class revolts or public protests by intellectuals, were tabooed topics until 1989. However insignificant these acts of dissent might have been as compared to other “fraternal” countries, Radio Free Europe and other Western broadcasting agencies managed to cover such developments and keep Romanians informed of their occurrence.⁴ Thus, after 1989, the emerging civil society considered that the recuperation of the “true” history was a top priority.

Reprints of volumes published abroad, drawer diaries and memoirs that finally found their way to publishing houses, witness accounts and recollections fixed in written form, as well as documentaries, public debates, and conferences started to disseminate gradually personal stories from the time of communism. Among these, the autobiographical recollections of those whose lives were disrupted because they happened to be part of the interwar political, intellectual, or economic elite, constitute the largest corpus of published memories.⁵ In such testimonies, the postwar period—previously depicted so luminously—turns dark. Among these, the prison recollections, which revealed the most hidden and gruesome side of the communist regime, are certainly the most poignant. These are stories of innocent individuals sent to prison without a trial, or after a faked one, to undergo there unthinkable suffering: malnutrition, cold, absolute isolation, exhausting labor, and systematic beating. These are also stories about

³ The disjunction between official narratives and societal perceptions is illustrated by the following joke that circulated under communism. When the party tried to collect testimonies from the few survivors of the peasant revolt in 1907, one peasant who knew very well what was expected from him told the interviewers how hard and repeatedly he was beaten because he dared to revolt against the oppressive bourgeois authorities. His wife, who was less intelligent, intervened: “You are already senile, the beating happened when collectivization was enforced upon our village, not in 1907!”

⁴ A recently published volume that includes letters sent to Radio Free Europe by individuals who never entered open dissent, but tried to inform on the daily abuses as perceived from their humble perspective, shows how popular it was in Romania. See Gabriel Andreescu and Mihnea Berindei, eds., *Ultimul deceniu comunist: Scrisori către Radio Europa Liberă, Vol. I: 1979–1985* (Iași: Polirom, 2010).

⁵ Many publishing houses established series dedicated to recollections from communism, but two of them feature prominently. Humanitas, the post-1989 publishing house that enjoyed the greatest trust among the readership, initiated series such as *Procesul comunismului* (The trial of communism) and *Memorii/Jurnale* (Memoirs/Diaries), which included mostly private accounts of traumatic experiences under communism. The other influential publisher, Polirom, also designed book collections dedicated to testimonies from the recent past, such as the series *Document* and *Ego-grafii* (Ego-graphs). The latter series mostly comprised recollections from the post-terror period, no less marked by tragedies detectible in every small aspect of daily life.

destroyed families, ruined careers, and physical existences suppressed.⁶ Their authors, former political prisoners, emerged as the most coherent group that remembered Romanian communism. Their recollections constituted the basis of the post-1989 social, civic, and political identity of this group—the victims of communism. Although only few of them survived the regime and even fewer left public testimonies in postcommunism, the readers interested in the recent past were sympathetic to their stories of suffering. After one learns about so many broken lives, it actually seems insensitive to remember anything less tragic about the communist period. Thus, in the long run, this previously suppressed memory that surfaced in the public sphere in postcommunism, emerged not only as a form of commemorating the victims, but also as the cornerstone of the hegemonic collective representation of communism.

Even without an established interpretative framework, such accounts by authors so diverse but fused together by common suffering bear witness that communist terror in Romania aimed at annihilating all those suspected of plotting against the regime.⁷ “Enemies of the people” were detected in any political or social group and turned into victims: politicians from the “historical” parties; presumed Titoists deported from their homes and placed under house arrest after the Tito–Stalin split; students and intellectuals repressed during the post-1956 wave of terror; peasants opposing collectivization and workers who revolted against inhumane conditions; persons institutionalized in psychiatric hospitals because they expressed inconvenient truths; post-Helsinki dissidents harassed, arrested, imprisoned, or expelled from the country even in the late 1970s and the 1980s. The victims were men and women, young and old, all innocent individuals, whose guilt was never properly proven by a regime that disregarded completely the rule of law. Although one could see from such memoirs that the murderous conditions of the 1950s prisons were alleviated by

⁶ As early as 1990, a special journal, *Memoria: Revista gândirii arestate* (Memory: Journal of arrested thought) was established at the initiative of a former political prisoner, physician Banu Rădulescu. The journal published traumatic recollections from the communist prisons by political prisoners who ended up there for the guilt of thinking independently—as the phrase “arrested thought” suggests. Besides preserving a hitherto unknown part of the national past, the journal also collected information on the geography of the Romanian Gulag and compiled a list of those who died in the communist prisons.

⁷ Witness accounts on terror and repression available in foreign languages include: Paul Goma, *Gherla* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976); Lena Constante, *L'évasion silencieuse* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1990), available in English as *The Silent Escape* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995); Gheorghe Boldur Lăteşcu, *Genocidul comunist în România*, 4 vols. (Bucharest: Albatros, 1992–2003), available in English as *Communist Genocide in Romania* (Hauppauge, NY: Nova Science Publishers, 2005); Radu Mărculescu, *Leid und Offenbarung in der sowjetischen Gefangenschaft* (Berlin: C&N Verlag, 2008). More bibliographical references are to be found in Cristina Petrescu's “The Afterlife of the Securitate: On Moral Correctness in Postcommunist Romania,” included in this volume, 385–415.

the 1980s, it became clear that the Romanian communist authorities made use of repressive methods until its very end.⁸ Repression was an effective instrument of control that the regime in Bucharest employed on a mass scale during the two great waves of terror, after 1944 and after 1956, and sporadically even after the political prisoners were officially released in 1964. Bearing witness to the atrocities committed by the communist dictatorship, the authors of prison recollections implicitly substantiate the thesis that such a regime could not have survived without the extensive use of terror.

A second group, comprising the urban educated elite, tried to adapt to the constraints imposed by the regime. This group is rather heterogeneous not only in terms of its relationship to the regime, but also because it includes individuals with various professional backgrounds. Yet, they were united by a common ability to express themselves in writing better than other social groups. The life trajectories of many of its members under communism partially overlap with those of the political prisoners, as many of them also suffered imprisonment. Interestingly, the stories narrated by former political prisoners and those by the few dissident intellectuals of late communism largely converge. Although not actually imprisoned, the latter recall more often than not the “softer” methods used by the secret police to intimidate, blackmail, or harass them, as those were part of their daily existence.⁹ However, the personal accounts of the urban educated elite refer to diverse issues, from professional matters to everyday problems, and thus transmit a more comprehensive picture of the communist past than evoking only imprisonment.

The most sensitive part of such private versions of the past refers to the dissolution of the “old order,” its moral foundations and cultural values. Even when spared imprisonment, the precommunist intellectual elite, including persons with doctoral degrees from European universities, found themselves deprived of property overnight, denied the possibility to earn a living, and thrown to the margins of society among individuals who had never been part of their world. If before the war they had a decent, if not wealthy existence due to their

⁸ Dissident Radu Filipescu—sent to prison for ten years in 1983 for spreading anticommunist manifestos, but released under international pressure only three years later—testifies to the significant number of unknown individuals that dared to speak out against the regime and were incarcerated in the 1980s. Such people were unable to alert individuals or groups in the West that could then advocate for their release via the international media or human rights organizations. See Herma Köpernik Kennel, *Jogging cu Securitatea: Rezistența tânărului Radu Filipescu* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 1998).

⁹ From among such writings, see Gabriel Andreescu, *L-am urât pe Ceaușescu: Ani, oameni, disidență* (Iași: Polirom, 2009); Doina Cornea, *Jurnal: Ultimele caiete* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2009); Mihai Botez, *Scrisori către Vlad Georgescu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2003); Dan Petrescu and Liviu Cangeopol, *Ce-ar mai fi de spus: Convorbiri libere într-o țară ocupată* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2000).

intellectual skills, after the communist takeover they were forced to scrape a living by working as unskilled laborers. If the prison memoirs illustrate the extreme suffering that innocent human beings were forced to endure, such testimonies bear witness to the recurrent misery in everyday life.¹⁰ Other interesting accounts describe the sudden interaction of interwar elites with members of the underclass—many of whom had become overnight the new elite of the country—which suggests that, contrary to what the communists preached, poverty is not always a virtue in itself.¹¹ Together, these recollections convey the idea that the destruction of the precommunist elite was a large-scale programmatic act, put into practice by the former regime through methods that by far exceeded sheer imprisonment.

Members of younger generations of urban educated individuals who were socialized exclusively under communism produced less dramatic, yet equally critical accounts of the past. Their recollections are more diverse than those of the previous generation because their life trajectories under the communist regime were also more divergent. While few ended up as dissidents, the largest majority tried to muddle through under the circumstances. If one is to find a common denominator to their private stories, it is that none failed to touch upon the ideological constraints imposed by the regime. Indeed, in Romania certain liberalization occurred only shortly during the 1960s just to be brought to an

¹⁰ Jeni Acterian, *Jurnalul unei ființe greu de mulțumit, 1932–1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991; new and rev. edition 2007); Annie Bentoiu, *Timpul ce ni s-a dat: Memorii, 1944–1947* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007); Arșavir Acterian, *Jurnal, 1929–1945/1958–1990* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008); Miron Radu Paraschivescu, *Jurnalul unui cobai, 1940–1954* (Cluj: Dacia, 1994); Radu Petrescu, *Catalogul mișcărilor mele zilnice: Jurnal, 1946–1951* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999); Pericle Martinescu, *Jurnal intermitent, 1945–1947, 1964–1984* (Constanța: Ex Ponto, 2001); Raluca Sterian-Nathan, *Suflet tatuat* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2010); Cornelia Pillat, *Ofrande. Memorii* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011); Micaela Ghițescu, *Între uitare și memorie* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012); Lăcrămioara Stoenescu, *Memoria stigmatelor* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012); Dorin-Liviu Bîțfoi, *Așa s-a născut omul nou. În România anilor '50* (Bucharest: Compania, 2012). For a critical view on the postwar period expressed by one of the few genuinely left-oriented intellectuals, see Emil Dorian, *Cărțile au rămas neterminate. Jurnal, 1945–1948* (Bucharest: Compania, 2006); idem, *Cu fir negru de arnici. Jurnal, 1949–1956* (Bucharest: Compania, 2012).

¹¹ Those who in theory should have been Marx's proletarians and humble oppressed people were depicted—not exclusively, but generally—as a cast of characters from the clandestine world of petty crime. See, for instance, Sanda Stolojan and Vlad Stolojan, *Să nu plecăm toți odată* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2009). The orientation toward the right of the Romanian interwar political and intellectual establishment partially explains such visions. Yet, as the Romanian Communist Party hardly included intellectuals before the takeover, the country was indeed run by a “new class” of individuals with shallow if any formal education, whose strength depended on Soviet backing. For an analysis of the communist interwar elite, see Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lu' Tanti Varvara* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005), available in English as *Auntie Varvara's Clients: Clandestine Histories* (New York: Spuyten Duyvil, 2007).

abrupt end by Ceaușescu's so-called Theses of July 1971, which envisaged a re-Stalinization of culture in a nationalistic guise. Since most authors of these post-1989 accounts of the pre-1989 past are writers, artists, or historians, their professional careers were deeply affected by this policy not only because the freedom of speech was even more drastically limited, but also because the circulation of books and persons across borders was heavily restricted. Consequently, their recollections address strategies of coping with self-censorship, compromises made to get published, or issues such as the marginalization of competence and the promotion of compliance. Such accounts suggest that those who tried to guard the national communist tenets were always confronted by those who struggled to preserve a minimum level of professionalism, among whose ranks the authors always placed themselves.¹² Although the present-day readers find themselves caught into a network of rivalries difficult to decipher, the overall impression is that of a world governed by mediocrity and dogmatism pitched against expertise and creativity. In such conditions, even the preservation of professional standards was widely considered as an act of rebellion against the regime; in fact, it was the only efficient act of resistance under a regime perceived as being ready to suppress any open disobedience.¹³ Thus, in

¹² From among recollections by writers and literary critics: Mircea Zăciu, *Jurnal, 1979–1989* (Cluj: Dacia, 1993); Alexandru George, *Capricii și treceri cu gândul prin spații* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1994); Livius Ciocârlie, *Viața în paranteză: Jurnal, 1956–1977* (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1995); idem, *Cu dinții de lână: Jurnal, 1978–1983* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008); Florența Albu, *Zidul martor: Pagini de jurnal, 1970–1990* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1994); Nicolae Breban, *Sensul vieții*, 4 vols. (Iași: Polirom, 2003–2007); idem, *Confesiuni violente* (Bucharest: Du Style, 1994). From among testimonies by historians: David Prodan, *Memorii* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1993); Dinu C. Giurescu, *Amintiri, mărturii: De la Sovromconstrucții nr. 6 la Academia Română* (Bucharest: Meronia, 2008); Florin Constantiniu, *De la Răutu și Roller la Mușat și Ardeleanu* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2007). From among memories expressed by less prominent professionals in various artistic fields: Valentin Uritescu, *Așa sunt eu, prost. Fragmente autobiografice* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2011); Luli August Sturdza, *Așa s-au întâmplat, așa le-am însemnat* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012).

¹³ Such a response to the ideological pressure of the regime was dubbed “resistance through culture” by those who claimed to have practiced it under communism. A fundamental text that theorizes this specific way of resisting the Ceaușescu regime is the introduction to Gabriel Liiceanu, *Jurnalul de la Păltiniș: Un model paideic în cultura umanistă* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991), 5–15; for an English translation see *The Păltiniș Diary: A Paideic Model in Humanist Culture* (New York–Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000). “Resistance through culture” in the view of its practitioners meant to maintain good professional standards by being connected to the values, ideas, and new trends in European culture, and produce works worthy of a notable place in European culture. It was a form of avoiding supporting the official communist views that, more often than not, stopped short of transforming itself in open dissent. A self-critical and ironic view on what represented “resistance through culture” is expressed by another practitioner, Vintilă Mihăilescu: “It was normal to come together in the end.... Because we acted with professionalism.... We were not against the institutions,... but we did what we could to stay in their shadow.... I found out later that this was ‘resistance

the economy of these recollections—obviously destined to construct the legacy of their authors—the largest place is occupied by professional anomalies and personal anxieties related to their careers. This kind of (mis)remembering communism by nondissident intellectuals and professionals who outnumbered the other groups, and were far more influential in the public sphere, contributed substantially to the collective representation of the recent past and strengthened the belief that control by the party was quasi-total.

Most of these stories, although private, focus on the political intrusion of the regime into the daily lives of its citizens, from the brutal interruption of normal existence caused by arrest and imprisonment to the more benign constraints of professional life. Only few recollections refer to social aspects. Some accounts tend to remember almost obsessively the routine of survival during the deep crisis of the 1980s,¹⁴ but hardly any refer to the “normal” 1960s¹⁵ as past miseries were worthier of remembrance in comparison to the short-lived period of economic improvement. Since beyond working for a meager salary or queuing for food hardly any other daily routines are remembered, most autobiographical recollections create the impression of lives devoid of private existence. The memory of pre-1989 everyday life has been preserved in other former communist countries not only through personal accounts, but also by photo albums reproducing illustrations of period vehicles, electric appliances, advertisements, food, drinks, clothing, recipes, toys, kids’ games, and various other items. To date, in Romania such trend has appeared only in virtual form, i.e., on the Internet.¹⁶ In private, family and friends might remember together how people used to dress, eat, drink, and enjoy themselves under communism, as this is part of

through culture.” See his “Ăștia eram noi,” in *Cum era? Cam așa: Amintiri din anii comunismului (românesc)*, ed. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 18.

¹⁴ Besides Petrescu and Cangeopol, *Ce-ar mai fi de spus*, the decay of daily life in the 1980s is remembered in Liviu Antonesei, *Jurnal din anii ciurmei, 1987–1989: Încercări de sociologie spontană* (Iași: Polirom, 1995); Stelian Tănase, *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă: Dosar & Jurnal din anii tirzii ai dictaturii* (Bucharest: Compania, 2002). Especially interesting is the out-of-the-ordinary testimony of a former employee in the party catering system, Gheorghe Florescu, *Confesiunile unui cafegiu* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008).

¹⁵ The communist consumerism of the 1960s and 1970s is reflected by default only in several commercials, as research conducted in the frame of this project has illustrated. The tangible improvement of living standards since the early 1960s modified consumption patterns and ultimately household design as most average Romanians had, for the first time ever, financial resources beyond the bare minimum necessary for biological survival. This small surplus income was used for the acquisition of small and rather kitschy decorative objects, symbols of another social status, as discussed in Andi Mihalache’s paper included in this volume, 217–229.

¹⁶ These online memories almost exclusively belong to a younger generation that, given its age, neither lived through spectacular events nor feels guilty for enduring silently a regime like Ceaușescu’s late communism. See Cristina Petrescu’s “Websites of Memory: In Search of the Forgotten Past,” included in this volume, 595–613.

their personal past. Such memories barely find their way in public, unless they speak of the miserable years after the war or the equally miserable years before the revolution.

The testimonies analyzed so far illustrate that the Romanian communist regime fulfilled none of its initial promises; quite the contrary, it turned against its own citizens. The only group that tried to substantiate a different thesis on the recent past by narrating their personal experiences was—not surprisingly—that of the “men of the former regime,” those party apparatchiks who were unable to adapt themselves to the post-1989 political order. Such witness accounts tend in general to obscure the issue of Stalinist repression and exonerate the first Romanian communist leader, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, under whose rule the great terror took place, of any guilt. Instead, the private accounts by party activists concentrate on the efforts to industrialize and urbanize Romania, which before the communist takeover comprised around 76% of peasants existing indeed in miserable conditions and struggling to make a living on their small plot of land. As Romanian communists always capitalized politically on the alleged independence from the Soviet Union, the recollections of the former party bureaucrats extensively tackled this issue, presenting it as the greatest possible achievement unparalleled by other satellite countries.¹⁷ Such arguments barely moved anyone after the harsh experience of the 1980s. Moreover, this independence lost any significance among ordinary Romanians upon the coming to power of Gorbachev, when many turned their hopes to the Soviet Union in the desperate belief that salvation from Ceaușescu’s rule might come from the Kremlin. The stories of the former apparatchiks may be characterized as narra-

¹⁷ Most of the former party activists that wanted to bear witness to the past rose to prominence under Gheorghiu-Dej and were subsequently marginalized by Ceaușescu. Some wrote in March 1989 an open letter of protest addressed to Ceaușescu; with few exceptions, they did not remain involved in politics after the collapse of communism. From among such recollections are: Lavinia Betea, ed., *Convorbiri neterminate: Corneliu Mănescu în dialog cu Lavinia Betea* (Iași: Polirom, 2001); idem, ed., *Alexandru Bârlădeanu despre Dej, Ceaușescu și Iliescu* (Bucharest: Evenimentul Românesc, 1997); idem, ed., *Maurer și lumea de ieri: Mărturii despre stalinizarea României* (Arad: Editura Ioan Slavici, 1995); Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită* (Bucharest: Universul & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992); Rodica Chelaru, *Culpe care nu se uită: Convorbiri cu Cornel Burtică* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2001); Silviu Curticeanu, *Meditații necenzurate* (Bucharest: Historia, 2008); idem, *Mărturia unei istorii trăite: Imagini suprapuse* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2000); Gheorghe Gaston Marin, *În serviciul României lui Gheorghiu-Dej: Însemnări din viață* (Bucharest: Evenimentul Românesc, 2000); Paul Niculescu-Mizil, *De la Comintern la comunism național* (Bucharest: Evenimentul Românesc, 2001); idem, *O istorie trăită* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 1997); Dumitru Popescu, *Cronos autodevorându-se*, 6 vols. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2005–2008). From recollections expressed by the offspring of the communists who took over power after the Second World War, a critical account on the hidden lives of former *nomenklatura* is Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Lumea secretă a nomenclaturii. Amintiri, dezvăluiri, portrete* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2012).

tives of deresponsibilization that offer by default a significantly less tragic perspective on the communist past. The readership generally ignored the argument put forward by such accounts as it resembled too much the pre-1989 official view on postwar national history. As primary historical sources, such recollections shed light on hidden details about the private life of *nomenklatura* members, backstage maneuvers, intraparty relations, and other spectacular events of the recent past. Otherwise, the contribution of the accounts articulated by those who served the former regime left practically no trace in the current hegemonic representation of Romanian communism.

This could give the impression that two visions of communism challenged each other in the post-1989 Romanian public sphere: one originating in the recollections of the party-state apparatus, and the other in the memory of civil society. Such a dichotomy neither reflects the great diversity of publicly expressed perspectives on the communist past nor epitomizes a debate on the recent past that never materialized. The limits of this study do not allow for a comprehensive analysis of the variety of private testimonies and the richness of the issues covered by such accounts. It only aims at mapping personal recollections largely shared among the members of a group of individuals whose autobiographical memory of communism conveyed a coherent message about the past. The first two groups discussed above—the former political prisoners and the urban educated elite—produced the overwhelming majority of private accounts on the communist past. Their numerical superiority, though significant, was not the only reason for their decisive influence on the construction of collective representation. As the following part of this study illustrates, these two groups also received more prominence in the media, better coverage in museums, and more attention from researchers.

Even without such external influences, however, any reader of memoirs and recollections from the communist past—the prospective shapers of collective memory included—would implicitly sympathize with the political prisoners. Moreover, there was consensus among these readers that the genuine victims of the former regime deserved a preeminent place in the collective representation due to their past suffering. At the same time, their Gulag stories strengthened the idea that the communists in power were a small clique that ruled against the majority. This statement represents an axiom held true by almost all who outlived Romanian communism, given their negative experiences in the 1980s. Almost everyone in the country is believed to have been a victim of the former regime. The stories of unbearable suffering in prisons only made the readers understand how far the communist regime went in turning its citizens into victims. Degrees of suffering were acknowledged as many from the younger generation asked themselves if they could have resisted the exterminating conditions in the communist prisons of the 1950s. Yet, Romanians not only sympathized with the former political prisoners, but also perceived themselves as shar-

ing with this group the same dignifying status of victim. The side effect of this phenomenon was the externalization of guilt by placing the responsibility for the almost forty-five years of communism solely on the former party activists or secret police employees and collaborators.

The personal accounts of the former political prisoners had another unintended but important side effect, at least upon the educated readership. This group not only epitomized the atrocities and injustice of the former regime, but also the resistance of society against the communist takeover. It implicitly revealed that a much larger number of Romanians—from those who had been once the elite of the country to common individuals that valued their freedom—had tried to oppose the communist dictatorship in one way or another. Such stories possess the potential of restoring a sense of self-esteem that had been lost by Romanians during the 1980s due to their incapacity to revolt against the regime and was regained briefly during the Revolution of 1989, only to be irrevocably lost almost instantly. Given the repeated failures of the present, the past as symbolized by the memory of the former political prisoners—victims and heroes of communism—illustrates the Romanians' ability to keep their dignity intact even when subjected to inhumane experiences. This therapeutic function assured such autobiographical recollections a special place in the representation of the communist past, including those who assumed the task of organizing the memory of communism.

Makers of Memory: Shaping Collective Representations

The uneven public impact of the autobiographical recollections of the communist era is not only the aggregate result of readers' sympathies, but also the effect of the interpretative key created in accordance with the imperatives of the present and applied to the past. As mentioned in the beginning, the process of preserving the memory of communism emerged from the outset as an integral part of the collective efforts to build the postcommunist democracy. This commitment appeared endangered as long as free elections legitimized former party bureaucrats and the break with the past, opened by the Revolution of 1989, remained incomplete. In this context, it seemed imperative to make public the crimes committed by the old regime so that forgetful or ignorant Romanians should learn that the essence of communism was repression and should stop voting for those responsible for past wrongdoings. Thus, Romania's democratic model, destined to bring it closer to Europe, emerged as essentially anticommunist. This engagement for building a democratic future was intimately linked with a representation of the nondemocratic communist past. Although political parties opposing the still active bureaucrats of the former regime also made use of anticommunist references to the past, the public vision of communism was

shaped by civil society organizations, institutes for preserving memory, and, to a lesser extent, professionals in the field of history. Consequently, even though the political priorities have shifted since the early transition, the agendas of those involved in producing and reproducing representations of the recent past have changed very little.¹⁸

In the absence of fresh professional reconstructions, all such authors—civic activists, film directors, journalists, or historians—have made extensive use of the publicly expressed recollections. The participation of the key groups discussed above in the making of collective memory was highly differentiated and depended on those who tried to make sense of autobiographical memories in order to reconstruct a shared past. In line with the priorities of the transition to democracy, the former political prisoners, whose testimonies best captured the criminal dimension of the former regime, received the greatest attention. Nevertheless, their privileged place among the carriers of memory from the communist period is above all a direct result of their own efforts. Driven by a stronger solidarity than any other group of remembrancers, the former political prisoners were able to carve out for themselves a distinctive social, civic, and political collective identity due to a remarkable self-organizing capacity. Immediately after the revolution, they established one of the first NGOs, which succeeded in a short time in gathering more than a hundred thousand members and establishing local branches in all counties.¹⁹ In the twenty years since the revolution, their organization was instrumental in building—with the help of private donations and the support of local administrations—memorials for the victims at many former communist penitentiaries. Due to their involvement a number of *lieux de mémoire* throughout Romania bear witness to the communist terror.

Numerous other civil society groups and prominent public personalities backed up this enterprise of collecting, preserving, and disseminating the memory of the survivors of the Romanian Gulag. In 1991 the national television started broadcasting a series of documentaries on the crimes committed by the communist regime. Although scheduled at very late hours, this series entitled

¹⁸ For more on the groups involved in preserving the memory of communism and the recent past, see Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “The Pitești Syndrome: A Romanian *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*?,” in *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen im Süden und Osten Europas: Bestandsaufnahme und Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 502–618.

¹⁹ The former political prisoners were very active politically, as well as civically. As a group they established in January 1990 the Association of the Former Political Prisoners in Romania (Romanian acronym AFDPR) to promote their rights and specific interests. Politically, AFDPR constantly supported the opposition to the successor Communist Party, while many of its members actually joined the postcommunist successors of the interwar “historical” parties. Civically, AFDPR supported the lustration of the “men of the former regime” and succeeded after ten years to pass a law regarding the disclosure of the employees and collaborators of the former secret police, the Securitate.

The Memorial of Suffering (Memorialul Durerii) brought into everyone's home the image of feeble old men and women who spoke about their destinies being broken in the communist prisons. From interwar politicians to humble peasants, the interviewees revealed that, through its institutions of terror, the former regime brought out the worst in human nature.²⁰ In contrast, and to viewers' general astonishment, healthy-looking former torturers interviewed in the same series showed no remorse.²¹ Such images propagated on a very large scale a previously hidden facet of the past that appeared more traumatic than most Romanians might have imagined before 1989 and made the audience feel compassion toward the unbearable ordeals of the victims. At the same time, these documentaries convinced Romanians that their version of communism was the worst. Furthermore, it showed that they also had their anticommunist heroes. If most people confronted the communist dictatorship only passively prior to the revolution, the visual narratives of this series documented a so-called "resistance in the mountains" that emerged in Romania in the aftermath of the Second World War. Briefly put, *The Memorial of Suffering* presented a story never told before, which included only victims and heroes, implying that the entire communist past could be reduced to a story of suffering and resistance.²²

The prominence of the former political prisoners in public representations could not have been achieved without the constant collaboration between their own association and the most dynamic and productive foundation in preserving the memory of the communist past, the Civic Academy (*Academia Civică*

²⁰ The content of the most important episodes is now available in a written version as Lucia Hossu Longin, *Memorialul Durerii: O istorie care nu se învață la școală* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), as well as on DVD.

²¹ In a memorable episode in 1991, Alexandru Nicolschi, a former notorious Securitate general directly responsible for the crimes committed during the period of the great terror, was interviewed about his involvement in the process of reeducation in the Pitești prison. His refusal to assume any responsibility in spite of the victims' testimonies enraged the audience. A short description of this interview is provided in Doina Jela, *Lexiconul negru: Unelte ale represiunii comuniste* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2001), 199–202.

²² Civil society organizations, including that of the former political prisoners, promoted two emblematic figures of the anticommunist resistance. One was Iuliu Maniu, former leader of the very influential National Peasant Party, who was sent in 1947 to the Sighet prison at the age of 75 to disappear in an unknown common grave. Never mentioned in communist textbooks, Maniu became after 1989 not only a symbol of the repression against the interwar democratic elite, but also the epitome of the mystification of national history by the communist regime. The second was Elisabeta Rizea, a peasant woman who was beaten and crippled in prison for helping an attempt to organize an anticommunist stronghold in the nearby Făgăraș Mountains. Shown on TV in 1992 during an episode of the Memorial of Suffering, Rizea impressed the audience with her resilience. She had refused to betray anyone in spite of the savage treatment in prison that left her handicapped for life. This low-key heroism turned her into an icon of the humble Romanians' anticommunist resistance. See also *Album Memorial: Monumente închinate jertfei, suferinței și luptei împotriva comunismului* (Bucharest: Ziua, 2004).

[AC]). The same intellectual group that established the Civic Alliance in 1990, the main catalyst of the fervent anticommunist activism specific to the early Romanian postcommunism, is also responsible for this enterprise. The AC not only involved itself wholeheartedly in collecting memories, in particular those of the victims, but also assumed the mission of codifying, for the first time in post-1989 Romania, the narrative on the communist past in the framework of a permanent public exhibition. The result was a memorial museum dedicated to, according to the inscription above its entrance, “the victims of communism and the resistance.” A research center intended to support the concept of the exhibition with adequate historical research was annexed to the museum. In 1993, when this initiative took roots, knowledge about the communist period still heavily relied on the few analyses and memoirs rescued from desk drawers or from exile. The need to fill in the blank spots of the recent past pushed the AC to establish its own oral history department. Their systematic work of collecting private memories aspired to give voice to the voiceless common people who did not articulate their recollections in written form.²³ These endeavors of recording memories before they were lost forever were guided by the objective to illustrate the immense discrepancy between communist propaganda and the actual effects of the regime’s policies. Thus, the focus was not on reconstructing patterns of everyday life, but on collecting evidence of abnormalities, disruptions, and, above all, injustice suffered by ordinary individuals.

The place where the permanent exhibition was finally opened is highly symbolic in the geography of terror: the former prison of Sighet, where the most prominent interwar Romanian politicians found their death in appalling misery. The building was restored in such a way as to suggest its former state; some of the exhibition rooms are mere reconstructions of the prison cells and represent commemoration sites for the persons who died there. Together with the common grave in the nearby cemetery for the poor, where prisoners of diverse origins and social standing were cast away, this prison museum epitomizes the essence of Stalinism Romanian-style. Accordingly, the permanent exhibition illustrates mostly topics related to repression: the annihilation of political par-

²³ To date, its archive consists of 5,000 hours of interviews with “former political prisoners and others that lived significant experiences under communism.” The main topics of the center’s research, which are largely reflected in the museum exhibition, are: the Romanian Gulag with its exceptional “Pitești phenomenon” of reeducation in prison, the collectivization of agriculture, the anticommunist resistance in the mountains in the late 1940s and 1950s, the student movements, exile, dissidents and critics of the Ceaușescu regime, the abusive demolition of private homes and historical monuments under his rule, the intrusion in family life due to the policy of increasing birthrate. See “Departamentul de Istorie Orală,” *Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței* website, http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=335%3Adepartamentul-de-istorie-orală&catid=48%3Adepartamente&Itemid=142&lang=ro.

ties; the suppression of the church, the intellectual elite or the ethno-cultural minorities; the process of collectivization; daily life in prison; the deportations, the camps of forced labor; and the role of the secret police. Special attention is paid to Romanians' opposition to the communist regime: the postwar armed resistance in the mountains, the student revolts of 1956, the workers' major strikes of 1977 and 1987, and the later intellectual dissent under the Ceaușescu regime.²⁴ Constantly extended throughout the years, today the exhibition offers a comparative dimension to the opposition to communism: the workers' revolts in Berlin, the Hungarian Revolution, the Prague Spring and Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia, as well as the Solidarity in Poland are also remembered in Sighet. Lately, topics that do not fall directly under repression or resistance—such as everyday life under communism—were added, but their coverage mostly highlights the intrusion of the party-state in private lives. In the words of the curators, the displayed artifacts were related to the daily routines of “the people that were not behind the bars, but only enjoyed the kept-under-surveillance liberty from beyond the prison walls.” This memorial, which represents the only permanent exhibition on Romanian communism, and thus is a crucial institution in shaping the collective representation of this past, has remained true to its initial purpose of commemorating the victims and celebrating the heroes.²⁵ Any society that exits a nondemocratic regime needs such endeav-

²⁴ The permanent exhibition was subject to some criticism. Some have argued that it suffers from a practice that was first promoted under communism at the level of state policy: the elimination from history of all those who are undesirable. For instance, former dissidents who entered in conflict with the museum organizers were deprived of their rightful place in history. Mircea Stănescu, “Studiu introductiv: Despre criminalitatea comunistă, istoria și memoria ei,” in *Organismele politice românești 1948–1965: Documente privind instituțiile politice și practicile*, ed. idem (Bucharest: Vremea, 2003), esp. 29–34. A more critical assessment, according to which the Sighet memorial is a museum of communism turned into its opposite, is formulated in Gabriela Cristea and Simina Radu-Bucurenci, “Raising the Cross: Exorcising Romania’s Communist Past in Museums, Memorials and Monuments,” in *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, eds. Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2008), 275–305.

²⁵ Although the museum is in a remote location, its impact exceeds the mere possibility of visiting it, as today a virtual visit through the Internet is also available. Besides, the Romanian Parliament approved on 9 April 2013 the modification of Law 95/1997, which declared the memorial in Sighet an institution of national interest under the administration of the Civic Academy Foundation. The new law (Law 150/30, April 2013) permits the Sighet memorial to develop projects regarding the communist period and “aiming at recuperating the collective memory” in various locations throughout the country (http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/docs/2012/pr438_12.pdf). As a consequence, the Memorial of the Victims of Communism and of the Resistance opened on 9 May 2013 a second permanent exhibition in Bucharest. The Civic Academy is also involved in various other activities popularizing its representation of communism. It runs its own publishing house and hosts numerous conferences, as well as a summer school for pupils. It has established a day of memory, which is commemorated every year on Ascension Day, and

ors in order to leave behind the dictatorial past, but it also needs a museum that represents a comprehensive picture of that past.²⁶

Besides the Civic Academy, several other institutions contributed to a massive operation of preserving the memories of people who otherwise would not have expressed themselves publicly. This represented a new trend among those involved in reconstructing the past. Before 1989, the use of oral history sources as a professional practice was almost nonexistent. As historians remained isolated from the developments of their discipline due to Ceaușescu's nationalist and autarchic cultural policies, the whole trend of including in historical narratives the views of "people from below" rarely mentioned in archival documents, almost did not develop in communist Romania. After 1989, a sudden interest in ordinary individuals emerged in relation to the research on terror. The problematic access to the written archives of communism turned the attention to alternative primary sources, above all oral history sources. Thus, collecting and preserving the memory of communism became a "must" for all those dealing with the recent past.²⁷ A simple review of the interest areas, defined by institutions that established oral history departments, indicates that some issues were generally considered of high priority, others were conferred local relevance, and yet others were simply neglected.

A topic such as "the anticommunist resistance of 1945–1989" proved to be of nationwide concern, as it was high on the agenda of the other two oral history

is dedicated to "those who went through the communist prisons or fought against communism." See "Ziua Memoriei," Memorialul Victimelor Comunismului și al Rezistenței website, http://www.memorialsighet.ro/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&id=52&Itemid=157&lang=ro.

²⁶ In addition to the memorial in Sighet, the former prison in Râmnicu Sărat was transformed into a memorial dedicated to the victims of communism, albeit one which restricted itself to the commemoration of the political prisoners incarcerated once in this so-called "prison of silence." Organized by the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile in cooperation with several other state institutions and private foundations, this memorial opened its permanent exhibition in 2011. See "Expoziția 'Râmnicu Sărat–Închisoarea Tăcerii (1945–1963),' " Memorialul Râmnicu Sărat website, <http://www.memorialulramnicusarat.ro/expozitie>.

²⁷ The interest in oral history sources as alternatives to the written sources has dethroned the latter from their status of ultimate bearers of "historical truth" and has institutionalized the professional practice of corroborating both types of sources whenever possible, thus modernizing a little the outdated Romanian historical craftsmanship. This new trend is illustrated by a recent decision of the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) to complement its archive of documents produced by the communist secret police with an oral history archive. Launched in January 2010, the program entitled "The Victims of the Securitate Bear Witness" proved to be successful, since many of those who wanted to see their personal file also agreed to recollect not only their encounters with the Securitate, but also other episodes of everyday existence under communism. A list of interviewees is available at <http://www.cnsas.ro/documente/Lista%20persoanelor%20intervievate%20FINAL.pdf>.

groups established at the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj and the Western University in Timișoara. Both groups aim at preserving more than the memory of communism and collect interviews that cover the recent past as far back as living memory permits. For the postwar period their research partially overlaps with the remembrance groups that concentrate on repression and heroic resistance. Both groups were also sensitive to issues of local interest, in particular to cultural diversity, as they are located in the multiethnic environments of Transylvania and the Banat, respectively. Accordingly, both groups tried to document through oral history the attempts of the communist regime at erasing regional and ethnic differences for the sake of constructing a homogenous nation. A look into their collections of interviews attests that local identities actually resisted the communist policies of destroying cultural heterogeneity.²⁸ Although their research agenda was shaped and justified by the same top priorities in preserving the memory of the past, these two oral history groups conferred a larger meaning to the idea of resistance to communist rule: they both tried to capture aspects of everyday life that illustrated the common individuals' refusal—sometimes open, but mostly oblique—to conform to the policies imposed by the communist party.²⁹

In addition to these groups, the Museum of the Romanian Peasant initiated its own campaign for collecting oral testimonies from the communist period. As compared to the others, its approach is even more focused on the daily routines of ordinary people, rather than exceptional political events that brutally interrupted the normality of existence, such as arrest, prison, deportation, etc. By adopting a self-ironical perspective on the recent past and utilizing more sophisticated methods, this research group managed to preserve memories otherwise scarcely brought to surface in published recollections. While others, due to the age of the potential witnesses, gave priority to the early postwar period, the researchers associated with this museum preferred a hitherto neglected epoch, the troublesome 1980s. However, the rationale behind their research focus was guided by the same anticommunist spirit specific to the early postcommunist stage, which regarded the former regime as a detour from the normal political, economic, social, and cultural evolution of the country. While recollections

²⁸ The oral history group associated with the Western University in Timișoara and the nongovernmental organization the Third Europe has made available its collection of oral history interviews online: <http://www.memoriabanatului.ro/index.php?page=surse-memoriale&type=interviews>. The Institute of Oral History associated with the Babeş-Bolyai University in Cluj has posted information on its activity, including the collective and individual research topics, at <http://hiphi.ubbcluj.ro/hiphi/institute/orala.htm>.

²⁹ The paper by Smaranda Vultur (175–200) illustrates the interest in the ordinary lives of humble individuals, sometimes caught in extraordinary circumstances, which researchers associated with the University of Timișoara developed after 1989. The paper by Virgiliu Țărău and Tamás Lönhart (307–24) perfectly exemplifies the multiethnic dimension of memory in the city of Cluj.

from the last decade of communism in other countries expressed regrets for a sheltered existence, no such results emerged when revisiting the 1980s in Romania. Instead, average Romanians remembered the innumerable anomalies encountered in every little thing in everyday life at times of economic shortages and political inertia. Accordingly, the endeavors of the Museum of the Romanian Peasant, directed in fact toward urban memory, rescued from oblivion many annoying, embarrassing, or even twisted aspects of life under communism, which had been deliberately forgotten after the collapse. This enterprise was unique in that these daily routines from times of decay were revisited with detachment and exposed to ridicule.³⁰

Finally, the use of memory in constructing narratives on communism by historians and other professionals outside of the above-mentioned groups of oral history, must be also evaluated. In conditions that legally restricted the access to archives by closing them for thirty years and randomly blocking the reading of documents due to the protracted process of reorganizing the files, memory sources became very popular among historians. Autobiographical recollections from the time of communism were used extensively in order to discover fresh information on the recent past and support professional writings on the period. Two distinctive trends can be identified. The first is represented by those interested in the everyday life of common people under communism, whose coverage obviously required different interviewees or a different focus than most of the above-described endeavors. A fruitful direction in other former dictatorial countries, this trend remains still marginal in Romania.³¹ It is very telling that most representatives of this trend are nonhistorians interested in the recent past. Due to their efforts, a slowly growing corpus of works covers issues related to the experiences of ordinary individuals, workers, and peasants who tried to cope under the conditions imposed upon them by Romanian communism.³² However,

³⁰ The most interesting testimonies were structured in the form of a dictionary including relevant words and phrases from the informal language or from the official vocabulary reflected in the stories of common Romanians. The testimonies were collected under the guidance of late ethnologist Irina Nicolau, who unfortunately never had the time to finish her work. Her list of small items of everyday use is illustrative for her (self)ironic perspective on communism: “envelopes that don’t stick, ballpoints that don’t write, rubbers that leave marks, matches that don’t burn ...” See Ioana Popescu, “Changing as we go along ...,” *Martor: The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* 7 (2002): 11.

³¹ Furthermore, memory is neither subject to theoretical reflection nor is it the object of historical studies. The project that generated the studies included in this volume represents a premiere in the Romanian milieu. The participants are either middle-aged nonhistorians with a background in neighboring disciplines, such as literary studies, anthropology, etc., or younger historians who wanted to establish a break with obsolete professional practices.

³² Among such attempts one can mention: Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lăteș, *România profundă în comunism: Dileme identitare, istorie locală și economie secundară la Sântana* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2000); Dan Lungu, *Povestirile vieții: Teorie și documente* (Iași: Editura Universității

even the logic of collecting such testimonies was often subordinated to the idea of revealing not patterns of everyday life, but its disruption, particularly vivid through everyday life in prison. This reasoning is also discernable in the coverage of topics such as collectivization, a theme otherwise crucial for understanding the past of a previously agrarian country, and hardly comprehensible without taking into account the voice of those whose lives were fundamentally affected by the loss of their private piece of land.³³ To sum up, even the recovery of these humble daily existences was meant, more often than not, to simply illustrate the main theses of the hegemonic collective representation.

A second trend is represented by mainstream historians, still partial to the idea that only the event-oriented narratives of political developments constitute genuine professional writings. These practitioners often included as primary sources interviews with individuals, ranging from former *nomenklatura* members to former dissidents, in order to add as many details as possible to their narratives on communism. Such endeavors did little to enrich the post-1989 process of remembering the recent past because the same fundamental ideas of the hegemonic collective representation guided the interviews, as well as the subsequent reconstructions of the past. Nevertheless, some of these historians deserve special mention because of their interest in rescuing victims from oblivion. Following the visual model of *The Memorial of Suffering*, they contacted survivors of the Romanian Gulag that did not have the opportunity to make their testimonies public. Focused on clarifying tiny details, their efforts reconstructed individual trajectories through various prisons and recorded the life story of yet another victim for remembrance.³⁴ Finally, part of this trend of formulating minute accounts of the past based on memory sources are the attempts at thoroughly covering the most controversial event in Romania's recent history, for which practically all mature persons could bear witness: the Revolution of 1989. In this case, memory played a fundamental yet unexpected role: instead

"Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 2003); Adrian Neculau, ed., *Viața cotidiană în comunism* (Iași: Polirom, 2004).

³³ The two most interesting projects related to collectivization generated the following volumes: Alina Mungiu-Pippidi and Gerard Althabe, *Secera și buldozerul: Scornicești și Nucșoara, mecanisme de aservire a țăranului român* (Iași: Polirom, 2002), for an English translation see *A Tale of Two Villages: Coerced Modernization in the East European Countryside* (New York–Budapest: Central European University Press, 2010); Dorin Dobrințu and Constantin Iordachi, eds., *Țărănimea și puterea: Procesul de colectivizare a agriculturii în România, 1949–1962* (Iași: Polirom, 2005), in English *Transforming Peasants, Property and Power: The collectivization of agriculture in Romania, 1949–1962* (New York–Budapest: Central European University Press, 2009).

³⁴ Examples of this kind are Alin Mureșan, *Pitești: Cronica unei sinucideri asistate* (Iași: Polirom, 2007); Cosmin Budeancă, ed., *Experiențe carcerale în România comunistă*, vol. 1 (Iași: Polirom, 2007).

of shedding light on a violent and controversial event, it only enhanced the confusion.³⁵

The above-described process of organizing the memory of communism created a unique collective representation of the past, which emerged in the particular context of Romania's transition to democracy, and, ultimately, outlived the circumstances of its formulation. The official condemnation of the communist regime as "illegitimate and criminal," a gesture meant to be a symbolic farewell to the nondemocratic past on the brink of Romania's accession to the European Union, represented yet another crucial step in the canonization of this public representation.³⁶ However, its future survival is ensured because two fundamental axioms are still largely accepted by those who articulate public discourses on the recent past. According to the first, repression in communist Romania was the cruelest in the Soviet bloc not only because of its scale, but also because of the methods used. Many other countries have undergone ruthless terror in the early years after the communist takeover, but Romania registered a phenomenon regarded as an epitome of the worst in these excesses: the so-called Pitești "reeducation" experiment. Unparalleled in the Eastern bloc, it aimed not only at depriving individuals of liberty under conditions meant to exterminate them, but also at turning the survivors into loyal communists. In this penitentiary, some of the prisoners were made round-the-clock torturers of their inmates in the attempt to completely destroy personalities, wipe out minds, and erase the difference between victims and perpetrators.³⁷ This experiment,

³⁵ For more on this, see Dragoș Petrescu's paper "The Revolution of 1989 and the *Rashomon* Effect: Recollections of the Collapse of Communism in Romania," included in this volume, 533–48. Among the historical reconstructions of the revolution that made use of personal recollections, see Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Istoria loviturilor de stat din România*, vol. 4 (Bucharest: Rao, 2006); Stan Apostol, *Revoluția română văzută din stradă, decembrie 1989–iunie 1990* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007); Lucian Dan Teodorovici and Dan Lungu, *Str. Revoluției nr. 89* (Iași: Polirom, 2009). The only coherent project of this kind, which indeed rescued from oblivion the memory of many participants to the revolution, was conducted by a young journalist and materialized in a series of three volumes: Grigore Cartianu, *Sfârșitul Ceaușeștilor: Să mori împușcat ca un animal sălbatic* (Bucharest: Adevărul Holding, 2010); idem, *Crimele revoluției: Sîngeroasa diversiune a KGB-iștilor din FSN* (Bucharest: Adevărul Holding, 2010); idem et. al., *Teroriștii printre noi: Adevărul despre ucigașii Revoluției* (Bucharest: Adevărul Holding, 2011). The latest project of oral history recuperated the experience of the youngest revolutionaries who were students in December 1989: Zoltán Rostás and Florentina Țone, *Tânăr student caut revoluționar*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2012).

³⁶ The official condemnation of communism by President Traian Băsescu took place in front of the joint Chambers of Romanian Parliament on 18 December 2006 on the basis of a report drawn up by a commission of experts on the communist past. See Vladimir Tismăneanu, Dorin Dobrințu, and Cristian Vasile, eds., *Raport Final al Comisiei Prezidențiale pentru Analiza Dictaturii Comuniste din România* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007).

³⁷ The uniqueness of this experiment in the Eastern bloc is confirmed by Stéphane Courtois et al., *Le livre noir du communisme: Crimes, terreur et répression* (Paris: Éditions Robert Laffont,

which was not implemented on a large scale, emerged nevertheless in the post-1989 hegemonic representation of communism as a symbol of the perverse suffering imposed not only on prisoners, but also on the population at large. The conversion of personalities in the Pitești prison was considered the embodiment of the large-scale process of turning Romanians into “new men (and women).”³⁸ Obviously, this argument fails to take into account that these reeducated individuals were the little cogwheels that made the system work for decades. Instead, it strengthens the idea that the Romanians, with the exception of the *no-menklatura* and the secret police, were all victims of the harshest communist regime in Europe.

According to the second axiom, Romanians were from the very beginning the most stubborn anticommunists in the Soviet bloc. Unfortunately, the effective work of the secret police, which ruthlessly repressed anyone who dared to oppose the new regime, transformed them later into a silent mass, unable to react even to the most aberrant policies implemented in late communism. This axiom relied on the post-1989 revelation that a so-called “resistance in the mountains” was organized in the aftermath of the Second World War. According to public recollections from the times of terror, a noticeable number of Romanians tried to hide in the mountains, hoping to organize a guerilla war in the expected event of an Allied intervention against the occupying Red Army. Such expectations died after the Hungarian Revolution and the groups hiding in the mountains, cut from the support of the population, were annihilated by the early 1960s.³⁹ Yet, the very existence of the “resistance in the mountains” induced the idea that the Romanians—although silently enduring in the 1980s the worst communist regime on record in terms of living standards and human rights—had been the first in the Soviet bloc to manifest their anticommunism. More-

1997). The groundbreaking account on this phenomenon is Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitești* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990). Recent research demonstrates that reeducation was applied in other Romanian prisons as well. Mircea Stănescu, *Reeducarea în România comunistă, 1945–1952: Aiud, Suceava, Pitești, Brașov* (Iași: Polirom, 2010).

³⁸ The idea that before 1989 the whole country was a prison in which the entire Romanian nation was subjected to a Pitești-style process of reeducation at the end of which each and every Romanian was turned into a “new man,” has become a commonplace of postcommunism. See this argument, for instance, in Horia-Roman Patapievic, “Anatomia unei catastrofe,” in idem, *Politice* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1996), 79–94.

³⁹ The few survivors of this bold enterprise bore witness after 1989 for this hitherto unknown heroism that some Romanians were capable of. Although attempts of organizing a resistance movement occurred in every mountain region of Romania, the groups in the Făgăraș Mountains—to which the above-mentioned Elisabeta Rizea from the village of Nucșoara was in touch—remain to this day the symbol of this phenomenon. Irina Nicolau and Theodor Nițu, eds., *Povestea Elisabetei Rizea din Nucșoara: Mărturia lui Cornel Drăgoi* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991); Aurora Liiceanu, *Rânile memoriei: Nucșoara și rezistența din munți* (Iași: Polirom, 2003).

over, the “resistance in the mountains,” though it could not turn all Romanians into freedom fighters, provided nevertheless the much-needed heroes for the collective representation of the recent past. In a country where anticommunism is synonymous with democratization, such heroes have been accepted indiscriminately: all anticommunist fighters in the mountains, including the former fascists, became post-1989 symbols of the struggle for preserving democracy.⁴⁰ According to these two axioms, Romanians were strong opponents of a powerful enemy, communism, which could not be defeated easily, but required a strong tribute of victims as so often happens in history. These ideas about the recent past fit perfectly within the patterns that have shaped the national histories of the small nations in Eastern and Central Europe since the nineteenth century, and especially the self-perception of the “losers of history” who continuously and hopelessly had to confront much stronger enemies.

Concluding Remarks

In communist Romania, the official version of postwar history was in obvious conflict with personal experiences. In the 1980s, the public–private dichotomy, which characterizes any communist state, became more substantial and evident than in other countries of the Soviet bloc, and a majority of the population was aware of this. After 1989, once the ideological constraints were removed, the discovery of the “true” history of communism should have served the purpose of bringing to an end this fundamental conflict between private stories and public representations. Until professional reconstructions could be produced, the knowledge of Romanian communism came from the accumulated autobiographical memories that conveyed private versions of the past. Only some of those who remembered communism, however, enjoyed legitimacy in postcommunism, while others were discredited. After the dictatorship, the former political prisoners, the victims of the former regime, bore witness to the most horrible violations of human rights. Their suffering rightly deserved public recognition, and when politicians failed to do this, the emerging post-1989 civil society took over the task of preserving their memory. Thus, the stories of the victims were gradually transformed into the standard knowledge of communism in public representations. In contrast, opprobrium surrounded *nomenklatura* members, who were rightly condemned for leading Romania into disaster, and their testi-

⁴⁰ An example of the kind is a freedom-fighter in the Făgăraș Mountains, who was turned after 1989 into a hero of the anticommunist struggle and taken as a role model by many from the younger generations, although a former member of extreme right-wing movement. See his memoirs in Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu, *Brazii se frîng, dar nu se îndoiesc: Rezistența anticomunistă în Munții Făgărașului*, 6 vols. (Timișoara: Marineasa, 1993–2006).

monies were discarded as mere attempts at manipulating the past. Consequently, collective forms of representing the past were cast—consciously or not—by a line of reasoning that has simply reversed the official rhetoric of the former regime. If before 1989 communism was the best of all possible worlds and marked the most glorious period in national history, after 1989 communism was turned into the darkest age, which not only derailed Romania's normal development as conceived by the pre-1945 elites, but also destroyed all its noteworthy accomplishments. The testimonies that fitted into this logic became central in public representations, while the rest were ignored. Instead of being debated, understood, and accepted, the past was simply recodified. What is more, once formulated publicly, this version of the past practically reinstated self-censorship in the process of remembering the past, as few dared to express publicly any thoughts that diverged from this morally correct perspective. A similar response to the officially imposed narratives occurred everywhere in the former Soviet bloc immediately after 1989, but it was followed by a wave of less radical and more nuanced reconstructions. They did not aim at rehabilitating the former regimes, but at capturing the rich universe of private experiences of communism in order to better understand that past. The Romanian case represents an exception: the anticommunist public representation of communism has remained unchallenged to this day. This contrast between Romania and other former communist countries leads us to the conclusion that the greater the pre-1989 dichotomy between private experiences and public official discourses on communism, the stronger the post-1989 public consensus on interpreting communism as a national catastrophe.

The unintended result of this reading is the persistence of a collective representation of the past that is hardly able to absorb the multifarious memories of Romanian communism. According to the above-mentioned logic of organizing memory, there is little place for other recollections than those related to suffering and bravery in confronting the dictatorship. A narrative that includes only victims and heroes fails not only to represent collectively the Romanians who outlived communism, but also to explain convincingly the survival of the regime for forty-five years. Only a thorough investigation of the effects of the communist regime upon society can make Romanians transcend the stage of self-victimization, assume their passive role in maintaining the dictatorship, and, finally, distance themselves from their own past. Commemorations and rituals destined to remember victims and heroes are indeed necessary, but modern museum exhibitions and professional writings should offer different kinds of past reconstructions.⁴¹ According to the current standards of the historical

⁴¹ The Chamber of Deputies of the Romanian Parliament rejected on 23 April 2013 (with an overwhelming majority) the draft of a law aiming at establishing a Museum of Communism that would “not negate” this period of the recent past, as the initiators put it. The decision was

discipline, they should also reflect the very diverse and less glorious stories of the humble individuals who tried just to survive, but nevertheless contributed to the survival of the former regime by accepting it without revolt. So far, the everyday existence of such individuals was discarded from public representations as having no societal value in the transition to democracy.⁴² The largest majority of living Romanians never experienced directly the crimes of communism that represent the cornerstone of the morally correct public version of the recent past. Thus, as formulated to date, the public perspective on communism conflicts with many personal recollections, fails to reconcile the public and the private versions of the recent past, and perpetuates a duplicity specific to the communist system. As opinion polls illustrate, the current economic crisis stirred recollections of the “good old days of communism,” which selectively remember everyday life as experienced before the shortages of the 1980s and completely forget the dictatorship.⁴³ The public remembrance of the past crimes alone cannot change values and beliefs in a society, unless accompanied by a genuine process of dealing with the dictatorial past and its legacy. One might thus conclude that the anticommunist references to Romanian communism, instead of reflecting commitment to democracy, rather represent manifestations

justified on economic grounds. It was argued that already existing institutions are currently organizing exhibitions on the communist period and therefore a new museum is not economically justified (http://www.cdep.ro/pls/proiecte/upl_pck.proiect?cam=2&idp=12375).

⁴² Memories of everyday life, which had no place in the public representations focused on victims and heroes, have nonetheless surfaced publicly in a more systematic way, after *Evenimentul zilei* called “all those over the age of forty” to send “memories from the Golden Epoch.” As of February 2013, this newspaper publishes almost daily the most interesting recollections on diverse aspects of everyday life ranging from jokes about Ceaușescu to the evening program of the Bulgarian television that Romanians used to watch, albeit no one understood the language. See “Amintiri din Epoca de Aur”, *Evenimentul Zilei* website, <http://www.evz.ro/pagina-subcategorii/sectiune/amintiri-din-epoca-de-aur.html>.

⁴³ The existence of this private–public dichotomy is illustrated by a survey conducted at the request of the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes and the Memory of the Romanian Exile (IICCMER). The reception of the hegemonic representation is illustrated by an average rate of 50% affirmative replies to the question about the existence of repression before 1989 in a context where, as respondents indicate, knowledge of communism is shaped mostly by the media (56%) and the schools (33%). At the same time, to the stereotypical question “When was it better?”, the older the respondents are, the more inclined they are to reply that things were better before 1989: 63% of those older than sixty considered so, as compared to 57% of those between forty and fifty-nine years, and only 37% of those between twenty and thirty-nine years. Among the motives for evaluating the communist period as the better option were: full employment, decent living, affordable housing, social security, and public order. All these indicate criticism of the present rather than nostalgia for the communist past. Yet, comments in the media judged these replies as illustrative of an alleged failure of the national project of teaching Romanians the crimes of communism. See “Sondaje IICCMER-CSOP,” IICCMER website, http://www.iiccr.ro/pdf/ro/evenimente/perceptiile_romanilor_asupra_comunismului/raport_sondaj_opinie.pdf.

of public conformism. The canon of remembering communism in this country is indeed morally correct, but it largely missed its declared purpose of transforming Romanian society.

4. How Is Communism Remembered in Bulgaria? Research, Literature, Projects

Iskra Baeva and Petya Kabakchieva

Historical Studies and Memoirs

This chapter begins with a few words on the evolution of the historiographical interpretations of the socialist era in Bulgaria. The shift occurred almost immediately after 1989. Unlike some other socialist countries in Eastern Europe, in Bulgaria “the changes” were not the result of a “people’s revolution” but rather “a palace coup,” whereby the pro-Gorbachev group in the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party forced Todor Zhivkov to resign.¹ As a result, the transition process developed more slowly. Still, the reinterpretation of the recent past started on an absolutely negative note: all newspapers (even before the advent of the opposition press²) were full of stories of repression and power abuse by Zhivkov and “his circle” that subsequently became the focus of the revived opposition press.

When the date of the first democratic elections (10–17 June 1990) was set, the roles were divided. The total denial of socialism became the monopoly of the new political forces, while the former Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) changed its name to the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) as a first step in a complicated process of evolution: on the one hand it rejected the repressions of the past, but on the other hand it also pointed out the positive achievements. Ultimately, this stand proved to correspond better to public opinion in 1990 and the

¹ The same assessment dominates the Bulgarian historical field as a whole. See: Boyan Traykov, *10 Noemvri-prevratit 1989* (Sofia: IK Trud, 1999); Iskra Baeva, “The Year of the Palace Coup or a New Start in Bulgarian History,” in *Der Transformationsprozess in Bulgarien und der Weg in die EU*, eds. Peter Bachmaier, Andreas Schwarcz, and Antoaneta Tcholakova, *Miscellanea Bulgarica*, vol. 18 (Wien: Verl. Ostag, 2006), 45–52.

² In February 1990 the newspaper of the Social-Democrats, *Svoboden narod*, appeared again, followed by the newspaper of the new oppositional force UDF, *Demokratiia*, with editor-in-chief, Iordan Vassilev, a writer and art critic.

BSP won the elections with an absolute majority. However, the already existing negative attitudes toward the recent past among an active minority (intellectuals, youth, and some of the inhabitants of the larger cities) did not allow the BSP to govern, and it was forced to withdraw from executive powers (president and prime minister) by the end of November. This episode of the early Bulgarian transition demonstrated the importance of public feelings toward the past and led the political powers to invest more efforts in shaping them. This was a much easier task for the anticommunist Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which continued to publish memoirs of victims of repressions and to support the making of documentaries and movies.³

The prevailing negation of the collapsed system left its mark on the first wave of recollections. The picture of socialism was painted gloomiest in the memories of the repressed.⁴ However, a similar tendency can be found in the first memoirs by members of the former political elite, such as Zhivko Zhivkov,⁵ former member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee

³ At the beginning of the 1990s most of the popular films dealt with such problems, among them *Ti, koito si na nebeto* (1991, dir. Docho Bodzhakov), *Kladenetsi* (1991, dir. Docho Bodzhakov), *Vampiri, talasimi...* (1992, dir. Ivan Andonov), *Granitsata* (1994, dir. Iliyan Simeonov and Khristian Nochev), *Sezonit na kanarchetata* (dir. Evgeni Mihailov). Among documentaries, see the 1990s documentary series *Lagerite* (dir. Atanas Kiriakov).

⁴ Stefan Bochev, *Belene. Skazanie za kontslagera na Bilgaria* (Sofia: Fondatsiia "Bilgarska kultura i nauka," 1990); Ivan Minkov, "*Slinchev briag*"—*lagerit na smirtta* (Sofia: BZNS, 1990); Ekaterina Boncheva et al., eds., *Bilgarskiiat GULAG. Svideteli* (Sofia: Demokratiia, 1991); Khristo Brizitsov, *3000 noshti v zatvora* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1991); Stefan Bogdanov, *Dve smirti niama, a bez edna ne mozhe* (Sofia: K i M, 1991); Nedialko Geshev, *Belene—ostrovit na zabravenite* (Sofia: Biblioteka "Zavrishane," 1992); Docho Khristov, *Pred istinski demokratichen sid bih se opravdal: Memoari na ministira na vitreshnite raboti* (Sofia: Ingraf, 1991); Vladimir Svintila, *Litseto na Gorgonata. V politseiskata psikhiiatriia* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 1992); Iordan Khadzhiev, *Sidit na bradvata* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1992); Ivan Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im. Bilgarskata inteligentsiia v moite spomeni* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1993); Ivan Genov, *Sidbata na zhertvite. Narodniiat sid v Burgas* (Burgas, 1993); Mikhail Doktorov, *V skhvatka s oktopoda. "Vtoriat tsentir" v borbata protiv zhivkovistite, 1965–1968* (Sofia: Ares Press, 1993); Vasil Kazashki, *Te umirakha pravi, "narodniiat sid"* (Sofia: Firma "Kazashki," 1993); Zheliazko Stoichev, *Az biakh osiden na smirt ot narodniia sid. Po bozhiiia volia ostanah zhiv... Iz spomenite na edin bilgarski ofitser* (Stara Zagora: "Svetlina," 1994); Slavcho Trinski, *Nevizmozni istini* (Sofia: IK "Slavika-RM," 1994); Georgi N. Vasilev, *Ostrov Persin. Pozorit na Bilgariiia* (Sofia: UI "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1995); Petko Ogoiski, *Zapiski za bilgarskite stradaniia 1944–1989*, 3 vols. (Sofia: Fenomen, 1995); Petko Dragoikov, *Komunisticheskite represii v Golemanovo. Dokumentalni razkazi* (Plovdiv, 1995); Boris Khristov, *Izpitanieto. Spomeni za protsesa i sidbata na Traicho Kostov i negovata grupa* (Sofia: UI "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1995); Petir Dertliev, *Den pirvi—den posleden* (Sofia: Syat-Nauka, 1996).

⁵ Zhivko Zhivkov, *Kriglata masa na Politbyuro. XVI-ta republika. Sluchaiat Kremikovtsi. Razgromit na "Teksim." Chekhoslovashkite sibiitiia. Krakh na ednolichnata vlast* (Sofia: Interpress 67, 1991).

(CC) of the BCP, Stoian Mikhailov,⁶ former secretary of the CC of the BCP, as well as in the memoirs of the heads of the police services.⁷ A typical example was a book by Kostadin Chakîrov,⁸ one of Zhivkov's economic advisors, which caused a stir in 1990. In *Vtoriat etazh* Chakîrov gave detailed evidence for his thesis that Zhivkov had been a secret collaborator of the prewar police chief, Nikola Geshev, and provided much information about Zhivkov's wrong economic decisions. In spite of differences in emphasis and argumentation, the whole first wave of memoirs unanimously depicted socialism as an age of repressions, crimes, betrayals, misunderstandings, or simply stupid decisions.

In a very short time, however, and in some cases in parallel with the first wave of personal (memoiristic) interpretations, a second wave arose, characterized by an attempt to represent the recent past as a combination of "wrong" and "right." Naturally, the thesis that not everything in socialism had been a mistake was launched by the person most attacked after 10 November 1989, Zhivkov himself. Unlike most of his former collaborators, he did not need to "adjust" in order to save his reputation: posters with the picture of Zhivkov behind bars, demanding that he should be brought to trial had already appeared at the very first opposition meeting on 18 November 1989. As he could no longer appeal to the people by laying the blame for the "wrong" on others (as he did from 1956 to 1989), Zhivkov decided "to row against the tide" of mass feelings and started defending his rule, cleverly identifying it with everything positive achieved in the postwar period. He started in 1990 with interviews and letters to the media and his controversial book, *Against Some Lies*, was published in 1993.⁹ As a skilled demagogue, Zhivkov felt that the high social cost of economic reforms would gradually displace the political rejection of the former regime and would breed nostalgia for the security under socialism. He thus seized the opportunity, and while his case was still under investigation in 1991, declared that he was ready to take responsibility for what had happened during socialism, both for the "bad" as well as for the "good."

The third wave of memoirs emerged in the context of new adjustments and found expression in an impressive series of books by former communist func-

⁶ Stoian Mikhailov, *Zhivkovizmit prez prizmata na edna lichna drama* (Sofia: M-8-M, 1993).

⁷ Ancho Bekiarov, *Chetvîrt vek UBO* (Sofia: Letopisi, 1990); Georgi Milushev, *Po koridorite na vlastta* (Sofia: Intra Book, 1991); Anton Musakov, *Shesto* (Sofia: Sibia & Reporter, 1991); Dimitîr Murdzhev, *Taka gi vidiah...* (Sofia: Poligraficheski Kombinat, 1992); Angel Solakov, *Predsedateliat na KDS razkazva* (Sofia: "Teksireklama" AD, 1993); Tenyu Stoianov, *Tenyu Stoianov progovori—shpionazh, prevrati, protsesi, ubiistva* (Sofia: IK "Pelikan Alfa," 1933); Boncho Asenov, *Ot Shesto za Shesto* (Sofia: IK Trud, 1994); Dimitîr Ivanov, *Politicheskoto protivopostaviane v Bilgariia, 1956–1989 g.* (Sofia: Ares Press, 1994).

⁸ Kostadin Chakîrov, *Vtoriat etazh* (Sofia: K & M, 1990).

⁹ Todor Zhivkov, *Sreshtu niakoi lizhi* (Sofia: Delfin Press, 1993).

tionaries.¹⁰ These party officials followed Zhivkov's example and defended their life paths, emphasizing the advantages of life under socialism compared to the capitalism that was gaining ground in Bulgaria. Again, the most typical example was a new book by Kostadin Chakîrov, *From the Second Floor to the Invasion of Democrats*, published in 2001.¹¹ A decade after discrediting Zhivkov in his first book, this time Chakîrov declared him not guilty and accused his interparty opponents Andrei Lukanov and Petîr Mladenov of betrayal and the destruction of socialism, acting in cooperation with Mikhail Gorbachev, the reformer who had already lost his glory. This sharp swing in judgment reflected the changes in public attitudes and the desire to adjust to them.

As a whole, the memoir literature began with the complete negation of everything achieved under communism. Soon this changed to a differentiated attitude, in which both the negative and positive aspects of the system were present: memoirists were divided into anticommunists and "nostalgic" postcommunists. While the former denied the whole period, the majority of the latter mentioned the ills of socialism, even as the general picture was dominated by its advantages.

Memoir literature, whether it presented socialism in a negative light or tried to balance between failures and achievements, affected relatively little public feeling. The reason for this is that reading had dropped sharply in the transition years. Besides, memoirs were published in limited-edition prints by small publishers, hence it was difficult for even determined readers to find them. Even the SS. Cyril and Methodius National Library—the national library of Bulgaria—did not own all published memoirs about socialism.

The second factor forming young Bulgarians' idea of socialism is the educational system. At school, the socialist period is presented in history, literature and, partly, geography classes. The great importance of education was recognized from the very start of the transition, so the new political powers initiated changes in the school curricula. Teachers were the first ones to support democratic aspirations. Attitudes toward socialism had changed prior to the beginning of the transition due to the profound impact of Soviet perestroika in Bulgaria

¹⁰ Lîchezar Avramov, *50 osporvani godini. Spomeni* (Sofia: IK "Zakhari Stoianov," 1993); Stanko Todorov, *Do vîrhovete na vlastta* (Sofia: IK "Zakhari Stoianov," 1995); Lyubomir Levchev, *Ti si sledvashtiat!* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo "Ea," 1998); Konstantin Tellalov, *Memoarni zapiski* (Sofia: Scorpion, 1998); Atanas Semerdzhiev, *Prezhivianoto ne podlezhi na obzhalvane* (Sofia: IK "Khristo Botev," 1999); Ilcho Dimitrov, *Vsichko teche... Spomeni* (Sofia: IK "Tilia," 2000); Stanish Bonev, *Vremeto, v koeto zhiviah* (Sofia: Novi horizonti, 2001); Marin Grashnov, *Kamenniat letopis na narodnoto stroitelstvo 1944–1990. Kniga pîrva—Pionerite* (Sofia: IK Biznes revyu, 2000); Stanish Bonev, ed., *Grigor Stoichkov na 80 godini* (Sofia: ASI Print, 2006); Ivan Abadzhiev, *Sila na dukha i chovechnost* (Sofia: IK "Slatina," 2007); Georgi Karamanev, *Zhivotîi mi v tri epohi* (Sofia: IK "Zakhari Stoianov," 2006); Petîr Vutov, *Po moia dilîg diplomatcheski pît* (Sofia: Era, 2004).

¹¹ Kostadin Chakîrov, *Ot vtoria etazh kîm nashestviето na demokratite* (Sofia: IK "Trud," 2001).

through the direct broadcasting of Soviet television and mass subscription to Soviet periodicals. A procedure for writing new textbooks was initiated in 1988 and they were published at the beginning of the transition.¹² The attitude toward socialism expressed in these textbooks was critical but without total rejection, as was the leading tendency in the Soviet perestroika and its Bulgarian counterpart of *preustroistvo* (reconstruction).

The syllabi were fundamentally revamped after new political parties won the elections on 13 October 1991. In the middle of the 1991–1992 school year, the minister of education in the first UDF government and a former dissident, Nikolai Vassilev, withdrew from circulation all history textbooks and assigned historians known for their anticommunist positions the task of writing new texts in Bulgarian and world history.¹³ Hurriedly written and not meeting the textbook requirements, these were titled “Notes.” Their main goal was to provide a new anticommunist interpretation of history. Interestingly, the postwar period, the target of memoirs and popular negation in the early period of the transition, was not even represented in these new history textbooks. It was present only in the reference books on world history but in an odd fashion, since the author, Milen Semkov, an expert in the history of the international workers’ and communist movement, gave this movement considerable attention in the “Notes.”¹⁴

Socialism was not included in the syllabi until the mid-1990s, when the political situation changed with the BSP’s return to power. The Ministry of Education, now headed by history professor Ilcho Dimitrov, approved new history textbooks that encompassed the whole postwar period. In addition, for the first time alternatives in textbook writing were allowed, and as a result, Bulgarian schools were offered three textbooks that acquainted students with the whole span of Bulgarian history.¹⁵ Authors were free to interpret facts and, as a result, the texts conveyed different opinions. A negative attitude toward the socialist system was quite common but mainly with respect to its political characteristics. There were differences in the presentation of social and economic transformations—they were also criticized as a transfer of the Soviet model—but

¹² Stayko Trifonov, *Istoriia na Bŭlgariia 1878–1944* (Sofia: Prosveta, 1991); Khristina Mircheva, Chavdar Naydenov, and Iskra Baeva, *Istoriia za 9 klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 1991).

¹³ As a result of this campaign the so-called “Zapiski” (Notes) appeared: Petko Petkov, *Zapiski po istoriia na novoto vreme* (Sofia: IK “Sviat-Nauka,” 1992, 1993); Petŭr Angelov et al., *Zapiski po istoriia na Bŭlgariia 681–1878* (Sofia: Bulvest 2000, 1992); Bobi Bobev, *Zapiski po istoriia na Bŭlgariia 1878–1944* (Sofia: Bulvest 2000, 1992); Milen Semkov, *Zapiski po sŭvremenna istoriia 1918–1945* (Sofia: V. K. “Sv. Georgi Pobedonosets,” 1992).

¹⁴ This approach was preserved in the other textbook by the same author: *Istoriia 10 klas* (Sofia: Sviat-Nauka, 1995; 2nd ed., 2001).

¹⁵ They were published by Prosveta (authors: Vasil Gyuzelev et al.), *Otvoreno obshtestvo* (authors: Petŭr Delev et al.) and *Anubis* (Alexander Fol et al.) The majority of the authors are university professors and academic researchers. The textbooks were introduced in schools in 1996–1997.

some textbooks spoke positively of industrialization and of the general economic, social, and cultural developments.

The last wave of new textbooks emerged at the beginning of the new century under the right-wing government of Ivan Kostov. Per the instructions of the Ministry of Education headed by the historian Vesselin Metodiev, it was compulsory to include the term “totalitarianism” and to squarely repudiate socialism as a system. In defiance of the strict instructions, the new textbooks intensified the differences in the interpretation of socialism,¹⁶ possibly because after the first decade of transition the public attitude toward socialism was no longer predominantly negative.

Judging by the contents of history textbooks, one would expect young Bulgarians’ attitudes toward socialism to be negative. However, the impact of school should not be magnified, since textbook interpretations rarely reach young Bulgarians. The high school curriculum hardly ever gets to the study of socialism because it is orientated toward the preparation of students for the university entrance exam, and this covers only the period until the end of the First World War.¹⁷ Teachers prefer to teach history only until that period, avoiding the danger of finding their interpretations of modern Bulgarian history in conflict with the changing political conjuncture. Consequently, Bulgarian schools of the early twenty-first century practically refuse to offer knowledge of the events of almost the entire twentieth century.

The most important achievement of the historical profession during the socialist period was the formation of specialists. The professional expertise of scholars who were compelled to write according to the political precepts, but could read and amass archival material for personal use (out of desire for a deeper insight even with no publication prospects) enabled the field of history to overcome the crisis brought by the profound transformations in a relatively short time. Several books on taboo subjects were released as soon as the ban was lifted: Mito Isusov published two works of new interpretations on the Stalinist purges¹⁸ and Lyubomir Ognianov wrote a book on the political system of socialist Bulgaria.¹⁹ These works laid the foundations for the new study of contemporary Bulgarian history.

¹⁶ The three eleventh-grade textbooks introduced in 2002–2003, published by Prosveta, Planeta 3, Anubis, and Slovo, again with academic authors.

¹⁷ The media gave floor to a discussion about the chronological scope of history teaching, but those who insisted that the whole socialist period, as well as the transition years should be included, were very few. Iskra Baeva, “Glednata tochka na polititsite i istoriata,” *Trud*, 26 April 1998; 24 *chasa*, 24 July 2001.

¹⁸ Mito Isusov, *Poslednata godina na Traicho Kostov* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1990); idem, *Stalin i Bilgariia* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1991).

¹⁹ Lyubomir Ognianov, *Dirzhavno-politicheskata sistema na Bilgariia 1944–1948* (Sofia: BAN, 1993).

The biggest advantage to historians of socialism in the years of transition was the open access to the archives. On 12 December 1991 parliament passed the “Law on Confiscating the Property of the Bulgarian Communist Party, of the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, of the Fatherland Front, of Dimitrov’s Communist Youth Union and of Other Totalitarian Organizations.” Two years later the Central Archive of the BCP was transferred to the Central State Archives and was subsequently entirely declassified. This also applied to the regional archives of the BCP transferred in 1993 to the respective regional public archives. By the end of the 1990s a “twenty-five-year rule” of declassification of secret documentation was introduced.

Currently, the basic problems of Bulgarian postwar history are being researched, such as the system of repression, political evolution, economic development (the potential and the limitations of socialist industrialization and collective farming), foreign policy, and social relations. Scholars working on the period include Lyubomir Ognyanov, Mincho Minchev, Iliana Marcheva, Vladimir Migevev, Natalia Hristova, Evgenia Kalinova, Iskra Baeva, and others.²⁰ An increasing number of scholars from various spheres of the humanities direct their attention to the period of socialism, as evidenced by the growing number of publications in scholarly periodicals, and specialized Internet sites.

Institutionalization of Communism Studies

A number of foundations, nongovernmental organizations, and research institutes permanently or occasionally deal with the socialist/communist past. To these can be added several memorial complexes, as well as Internet sites set up

²⁰ Idem, *Diplomatsiia na sŭvremenna Bilgaria* (Shumen: Ep. K. Preslavski, 2006); Mincho Minchev, *Bilgariia ot novo na krŭstopŭt (1942–1946)* (Sofia: Tilia, 1999); *Vtoroto pravitelstvo na OF* (Veliko Tŭrnovo: UI “Sv. Kiril i Metodii,” 2001); Iliana Marcheva, *Todor Zhivkov—pŭtiat kŭm vlastta. Politika i ikonomika na Bilgariia 1953–1964* (Sofia: IK-Kota, 2000); Vladimir Migevev, *Kolektivizatsiata na bilgarskoto selo 1948–1958* (Sofia: UI Stopanstvo, 1998); idem, *Bilgarskite pisateli i politicheskiiat zhivot v Bilgaria 1944–1970* (Sofia: IK-Kota, 2002); idem, *Prazhkata prolet ‘68 i Bilgariia* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2005); idem, *Polската kriza, “Solidarnost” i Bilgariia (1980–1983)* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2008); Natalia Hristova, *Bilgarskiiat skandal “Solzhenitsin” 1970–1974* (Sofia: Izdatelsko atelie “A6,” 2000); idem, *Spetsifika na bilgarskoto “disidentstvo.” Vlast i inteligentsiia 1956–1989* (Plovdiv: Letera, 2005); Evgenia Kalinova, *Pobeditelite i Bilgariia, 1939–1945* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2004); Iskra Baeva, *Iztochna Evropa sled Stalin 1953–1956. Polsha, Ungariia, Chekhoslovakiia i Bilgariia* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1995); idem, *Bilgariia i Iztochna Evropa* (Sofia: IK “Paradigma,” 2001); idem, *Todor Zhivkov* (Sofia: KAMA, 2007); E. Kalinova and I. Baeva, *Bilgarskite prekhodi* (Sofia: Talia, 2000); idem, *Sledvoennoto desetiletie na bilgarskata vinshna politika, 1944–1955* (Sofia: Polis, 2003); Iskra Baeva, ed., *Istoria na Otechestvenia front/sŭyuz v Bilgaria* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Ohridski,” 2012).

to research and preserve the memory of communist crimes. The most important ones are discussed below.

The *Institute for Studies of the Recent Past* (<http://www.minaloto.org>)—an NGO, founded in 2005 under the guidance of Prof. Ivaylo Znepolski of St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia/Sofia University, Dimitry Panitza, chairman of the Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation, and Lenko Lenkov, a historian. The Institute encourages and supports research of modern Bulgarian history under communism from historical, psychological, social, and anthropological perspectives. It collects, preserves, and publishes documents, memoirs, diaries, and artifacts from that period. The Institute's mission is to provide a fresh view on the history of communist ideas and communist rule in Bulgaria through serious studies of specific periods, events, social groups, and individuals. The crimes of the regime have to be explicitly named, but the changes over the years also need to be analyzed. Daily life under communism needs to be studied in detail: its labor practices; social policies; harsh and milder forms of repression; family life; the structure and operation of the Communist Party; the clashes of interests and controversies within it; the relationship between the party's leadership and its base membership; the state of cultural and intellectual life and the different forms of resistance, from passive disagreement to all-out dissidence; and the dynamics of the relationship between the regime and society as a whole. It is also one of the tasks of the Institute to prevent the reproduction of the communist past as a mentality in the present and in the future.

The Institute conducts research projects on different periods of modern Bulgarian history and provides organizational and financial support to teams of scholars or experts, as well as individual researchers; publishes books based on the findings of research projects carried out by the Institute or thematically related to its interests; holds conferences and seminars based on the Institute's research projects or on related topics; organizes relevant exhibitions, and aims to found a museum with documents and artifacts from the recent past; establishes a comprehensive database in the field of modern Bulgarian history, through questionnaires, interviews, archival studies, and a thorough examination of memoirs and books covering the period.

Researchers at the Institute have already published seventeen books and eight volumes of memories, the most important ones about the BCP apparatus, its economic policy, the activities of the State Security Services, ethnic relations, and memoir collections.²¹

²¹ Aleksandîr Vezenkov, *Vlastovite strukturi na BKP 1944–1989* (Sofia: IIBM, “Otvoreno obshtestvo” and “Siela,” 2008); Martin Ivanov, *Reformatorstvo bez reformi* (Sofia: IIBM, “Otvoreno obshtestvo” and “Siela,” 2007); Daniel Vachkov and Martin Ivanov, *Bîlgarsiat vînshen dilg, 1944–1989* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, 2008); Momchil Metodiev, *Mashina za legitimnost* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008); Mikhail Gruev and Aleksei Kalionski, “Vîzro-

The *Centre for Liberal Strategies* (<http://www.cls-sofia.org/bg/>)—an NGO established in Sofia in 1994 for the purpose of studying social processes in Bulgaria and formulating liberal strategies. In 2004 two nongovernmental organizations—the Center for Liberal Strategies and the Red House Centre for Culture and Debate—organized a seminar “The Future through the Culture of the Past: Bulgarian Economic and Social History” as a research project dealing with problems of social and economic history, including the socialist period. The head of the project was Dr. Rumen Avramov. The main publications of the Centre are on the economic and financial development of socialist Bulgaria.²²

The *Centre for Advanced Study* (CAS) (<http://www.cas.bg/en/staff.html>), an NGO which organizes, promotes, and coordinates academic studies in the humanities and social sciences. It initiates long-term projects and academic events and has its own publications—the *CAS Newsletter* and the CAS Working Paper Series. The project “Bulgarian Communism: Critical Readings” specifically explores the socialist period. It has recently published the papers from a conference dedicated to the 20th anniversary of the changes.²³

The *Institute for the Research of Communist Crimes* was founded on 15 January 2005 in Sofia by historians, journalists, scientists, and other public figures with the task of carrying out research on communist ideology and practice and informing Bulgarian and world society about the crimes of communism, thus bringing about its condemnation. The director of the Institute board is Kalin Manolov, and the deputy director is Stoian Gruichev. Members of the board include the historians Plamen Tsvetkov and Evelina Kelbecheva, the economist Nikola Kazanski, the theater producer Emilia Tsankova, and the writer Khristo Troianski.

The *Ivan Khadzhiiski Institute* (directed by the sociologist Peter-Emil Mitev) was founded in 1997 as a private scientific institute for the study of social structures, social stratification, and social mobility; the dynamics of social attitudes

ditelniat protses.” *Myusyulmanskite obshtnosti i komunisticheskiat rezhim: politiki, reaktiv i posleditsi* (Sofia: IIBM, 2008); Daniela Koleva, ed., *Virhu khrastite ne padat milnii. Komunizmit: zhiteiski sidbi* (Sofia: IIBM, 2007); Ivailo Znepolski, ed., *Tova e moeto minalo* (Sofia: Siela, 2010); Ivailo Znepolski, ed., *Totalitarizmit na XX vek v sravnitelna perspektiva* (Sofia: Siela, 2010); Momchil Metodiev, *Mezhu viarata i kompromisa. Bilgarskata pravoslavna tsirkva i komunisticheskata dirzhava (1944–1989)* (Sofia: Siela, 2010); Ivailo Znepolski, ed., *NRB. Ot nachaloto do kraia* (Sofia: Siela, 2011); Plamen Doynov, *Bilgarskiat sotzrealizim 1956, 1968, 1989* (Sofia: Siela, 2011); Pepka Boiadzhieva, *Sotsialnoto inzhenerstvo. Politiki za priem viv visshite uchilishita prez komunisticheskia rezhim v Bilgaria* (Sofia: Siela, 2010).

²² Rumen Avramov, *Pari i de/stabilizatsiia v Bilgaria 1948–1989* (Sofia: IIBM, “Otvoreno obshtestvo” and “Siela,” 2008); Roumen Avramov, *Bilgarska narodna banka: Sbornik dokumenti. Tom peti. 1948–1990. Chast pirva* (Sofia: Dirzhavna agentsiia “Arkhivi” and BNB, 2009).

²³ Mikhail Gruev and Diana Mishkova, eds., *Bilgarskiat komunizim: Debat i interpretatsii* (Sofia: CAS & Riva, 2013).

and values; and their impact on political and electoral behavior. It carries out comparative research in Balkan and East European countries and organizes conferences and seminars. The institute collects and preserves a great number of memoirs, diaries, autobiographies, letters, interviews, and other documents by Bulgarian citizens dating from the period of socialism. The institute's "People's Memory" archive currently contains documents by over a hundred participants. It is openly accessible and allows researchers to gain knowledge about the everyday life of ordinary people and how the important political and economic processes of the socialist era were perceived and experienced in villages, small provincial towns, big cities, and the capital. In July 1999, the Institute organized a conference on "The Provocations of Social Memory." This is the only institute that does not aim to formulate and prove a particular thesis about the recent past.

The *Center for Historical and Political Research* (CHPR) is the successor to the Institute of BCP History, a structure that existed within the BCP's Central Committee. It carries out research work on problems of modern social democracy in the context of European integration and globalization; problems of BSP theory and practice; its development and future identity as a member of the Socialist International and the Party of European Socialists (PES). It is responsible for the party documentation and archive; contacts with academic institutions and civil organizations; and international cooperation. Historians from CHPR carry out research projects related to the period of socialism in Bulgaria. In 2008, the Center began a scientific project, "The History of Bulgarian Socialism," by publishing three volumes.²⁴ The Center created a website for the study of Bulgarian socialism (<http://www.bgsocialism.eu>).

The *Union of the Victims of the Repressions after 9 September 1944* was founded in September 1989 in Plovdiv as an organization for those who were repressed after 1945. It was headed by Dimităr Batalov and it took part in the creation of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF). Its statute and program was adopted by its national conference on 21 March 1990. The organization sent five deputies to the Great National Assembly as part of the UDF group. At the organization's national conference on 31 March 1991 it changed its name to "The Union of the Victims of the Repressions after 9 September 1944" and was relocated to Sofia. Together with other institutions the Union organizes conferences and seminars to condemn communism.

The *Free and Democratic Bulgaria Foundation* was founded as a private organization on 14 June 1991 by Yvonne and Dimităr Panitza with the purpose of bringing about the democratization of Bulgarian society by promoting political pluralism, a free press, a market economy, social tolerance, youth education,

²⁴ Evgeniy Kandilarov, ed., *Izsledvaniia po istoriia na sotsializma v Bilgariia 1891–1944*, 3 vols. (Sofia: Grafimaks 02, 2008–2011).

and free and open dialogue. The Foundation publishes books on history, philosophy, politics, and economics, including the problems of the communist past. The Foundation ceased its activities on 1 June 2009.

The *Georgi Dimitrov Foundation* is linked with the Bulgarian Antifascist Union. It carries out research and publishes projects related to Georgi Dimitrov. It also rewards scientific and art works on Dimitrov's life and deeds.²⁵

In addition to a multitude of organizations and institutes, special memorial complexes were also set up to research and preserve the memory of the crimes of the socialist era: at Persin Island at the site of the Belene labor camp, the Slínchev Den labor camp near Lovech, and the Memorial Wall and Chapel in Memory of the Victims after 1944 in Sofia.

Belene Labor Camp, Persin Island. After 9 September 1944 the BCP created detention labor camps for the political opponents of the new government of the Fatherland Front as well as for criminals. They were called "labor educational communities." The Belene Labor Camp on Persin Island on the Danube is particularly well-known as a symbol of the repressive system. It was created in June 1949, but it was closed after Stalin's death in 1953. The Hungarian revolution in 1956 frightened the BCP and the camp was reopened. "Politically suspicious persons," mainly from Sofia, were detained there, but in 1959 Belene was definitively closed. During the so-called "revival process" (the forced name-changing campaign of Bulgarian Turks and Pomaks) the buildings of the camp were used once again to isolate individuals who opposed the renaming. During the transition period after 1989, the Belene camp was perceived as a symbol of the repressions of the communist regime. Every year on 9 September and on other occasions, commemorations and religious ceremonies for the victims of the communist regime take place in the former camp.

The *Labor Camp near Lovech* was opened in the fall of 1959 because, according to the Ministry of the Interior, 166 prisoners from the closed Belene camp were deemed too dangerous to public order to be freed. The camp near Lovech is a stone quarry, where the prisoners were forced to work until total exhaustion. In the nearby village of Skravena, another labor camp for women was set up, where they worked on the local agricultural farm. The camp near Lovech had the harshest regime and consequently the number of victims was very high: 126 people in total died there. When the atrocities in Lovech and Skravena became known, the camps were definitively closed on 5 April 1962. Immediately after 10 November 1989, the press and politicians were eager to

²⁵ Some of the rewarded books are: Mito Isusov, *Georgi Dimitrov: zhiznen pít i politicheski idei* (Sofia: Tsentír za strategicheski izsledvania, 2004); Rima Kanatsieva and Tatiana Turlakova, *Georgi Dimitrov—mezhdú vízhvalata i otritsaniето* (Sofia: Tsentír za istoricheski i politologicheski izsledvaniia and Fondatsiia "Solidarno obshtestvo," 2003); Maksim Mizov, ed., *Georgi Dimitrov v obshtestvenata i nauchnata pamet* (Sofia: CIPI, 2010).

inform people about the repressions and the camps. As a result of these revelations, a monument for the victims was erected on 17 April 1990 near Lovech. President Petăr Mladenov and Prime Minister Andrei Lukanov of the BSP presided over the inauguration and pleaded in favor of national reconciliation. Instead, the monument became a symbol of communist repressions and has become a gathering place for Bulgarian anticommunists, who meet there on historical dates in order to commemorate communist victims and plead for retribution.

The Memorial Wall and Chapel in Memory of the Victims after 1944 was erected together with a chapel in the center of Sofia, in the garden in front of the National Palace of Culture (NDK) in 1999. The monument itself is a black marble wall with the names of those killed during the period after 9 September 1944. The inscription on the wall reads: "The suffering of our people is built into this wall! The memorial is erected to the memory of our compatriots, victims of the communist terror: those deprived of life, those missing, and those sentenced to death by the so-called 'people's court.'" The chapel is dedicated to "all Bulgarian martyrs." The Memorial Wall is a traditional place to commemorate the victims of communism and every year, on 9 September, a commemoration meeting is held at there, accompanied by a religious ceremony for the dead.

To these should be added the newly created *Museum of Socialist Art*, a branch of the National Art Gallery (<http://www.nationalartgallerybg.org>). Opened in September 2011, it consists of a park exhibiting socialist sculpture, a hall for temporary exhibitions, and a video room showing documentaries from the socialist period.

Progress in modern computer technology and increased use of the Internet by Bulgaria's youth gives them the opportunity to gain information about the socialist period, of which they have no personal memories. The most significant web pages are discussed below.

The goal of the *Bulgarian Communism: Critical Readings* web portal (<http://red.cas.bg>) is to accumulate research material and create a catalogue and information center of contemporary critical readings on Bulgarian communism. The portal unites the efforts of scholars researching the socialist period. It organizes regular interdisciplinary workshops and public presentations and catalogues existing knowledge about the communist period. The information is in both Bulgarian and English. The institutions that take part in the portal activity include the Center for Advanced Study in Sofia, the Open Society Institute, the New Bulgarian University, the Centre for Liberal Strategies in Sofia, the Department of History and Theory of Culture at Sofia University, the Cultural Studies Department at South-West University in Blagoevgrad, the Institute for Critical Social Research, and the Institute for the Research of Communist Crimes.

The Internet project for collecting memoirs from the socialist period *I Lived Socialism* (*Az zhiviakh sotsializma*) (<http://www.spomeniteni.org>)²⁶—was launched electronically on 26 March 2004 and was the first website for personal recollections from the socialist years in Bulgaria. The authors are writer Georgi Gospodinov, journalists Diana Ivanova and Kalin Manolov, and psychiatrist Rumen Petrov. The project is based exclusively on the use of the Internet as a tool and space for storytelling, where people were invited to send their own personal stories. Several hundred stories appeared on the website and in 2006 Georgi Gospodinov selected and published 171 of them in a volume titled *Az zhiviakh sotsializma*.

The Internet portal *Decommunization* (<http://www.decommunization.org/>) was created in support of the draft resolution of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on the international condemnation of communism. Another purpose of the site is to display information on the crimes of the communist regime. The board of advisors for Bulgaria includes Plamen Tsvetkov, Dimităr Nenov, Venko Beshkov, and others.

At the end of 2006, the Bulgarian parliament passed a special law regarding the access to former State Security documentation. This was the legal basis for the creation of a committee to deal with the personal files left over from the activities of the former secret services. This provoked a discussion whether the committee should evolve into a scientific institute similar to the Central European Institute of National Remembrance. However, this did not happen and the committee remained strictly political in character. Nevertheless, it offered some insights into how state control over society was exercised by revealing the former State Security affiliation of well-known public figures from the political, intellectual, and cultural spheres. The Bulgarian law covering the disclosure of State Security files has no lustration consequences; nonetheless, the reputations of many people suffered as their affiliation to the State Security apparatus became known. It is to be regretted that neither the law, nor the committee can point out the exact character of the collaboration and the real activities of those affiliated to the former State Security service.

Sociological and Anthropological Approaches to Communism

Sociological and anthropological works on communism in Bulgaria follow a distinct trend: at the beginning of the so-called “transition,” the predominant focus was on the theoretical conceptualization of communism²⁷—i.e., on what

²⁶ Gospodinov, Georgi, ed., *Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii* (Sofia: IK “Zhanet-45,” 2006).

²⁷ Various designations have been used for Bulgarian society from 1944 to 1989: “totalitarianism,” “state capitalism,” “socialism”—with or without quotation marks—as well as “commu-

kind of society the communist one was and which Western paradigms can be used to explain it. Toward the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s, however, a new interest in oral history and remembering emerged which focused on specific groups and phenomena of the pre-1989 period. We may safely generalize that there was a movement from the “general” to the “specific,” and from macro to micro approaches. Since there is no significant connection between the theoretical conceptualizations and the concrete studies, however, we tend to believe that researchers have become aware that the “object” of their work—real people recalling their personal experiences—is disappearing; hence, there is a particular urgency in collecting their reminiscences.

Theoretical Conceptualizations of Communism

In the 1990s Bulgarian social scientists were exceptionally ingenious in finding a number of varying theoretical approaches to communism, using insights from Max Weber, Ferdinand Tönnies, Marcel Mauss, Hannah Arendt, David Apter, Barrington Moore, Jr., Claude Lévi-Strauss, Joseph Schumpeter, Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, János Kornai, and Ivo Možný, to name but a few.²⁸

In the period 1990–1992 extremely opposed views on communism were aired. Communism, on one end of the spectrum, was conceptualized as “pre-modern paternalism,”²⁹ and, on the other, as a “hypermodern project.”³⁰ In addition, via Hannah Arendt, a view of communism as totalitarianism was adopted.³¹ Some scholars went as far as describing communism as a kind of political Dadaism. Others argued that communism was “state capitalism”³²—based on the premise that what had happened in the so-called communist societies had not been authentic communism but the rule of the *nomenklatura*, which, as a quasi-state capitalist, was the owner of the means of production. In the mid-1990s more moderate views appeared, conceptualizing communism as a specific modernizing project. The view of communism as accelerated modernization became relatively popular, a thesis proposed by sociologist Georgi

nism.” Authors critical of the communist era refer to it as “communism.” Overall, however, the use of the term socialism without quotation marks is prevalent. Here we are using the term communism simply because it has been adopted throughout the whole book; for a detailed discussion in support of its use see Petya Kabakchieva, “Rethinking Communism: Social Approaches for Comprehending ‘That Society’ in Postcommunist Bulgaria,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: SSR, 2010), 37–56.

²⁸ We will limit ourselves to a schematic presentation here. For a more detailed analysis, see *ibid.*

²⁹ Rumen Dimitrov, *NomenKulturata* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1991); *idem*, *Tribunal ili forum* (Sofia: Zhorzh Nef, 1992).

³⁰ Vladislav Todorov, *Adamov Kompleks* (Sofia: Izdatelska kîshta “Ivan Vazov,” 1991).

³¹ Rumen Daskalov, *Esata vîrkhu totalitarizma i posttotalitarizma* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1991).

³² Georgi Naidenov, *Kakvo stava?* (Sofia: Vikom-Kos, 1991).

Dimitrov in 1995, based on the modernization theories of David Apter and Barrington Moore, Jr.³³ Meanwhile, Andrei Bundzhulov, using Foucault's concept of "heterotopia," referred to an "overturned" modernization.³⁴ Foucault's approach has won some younger proponents as well: Momchil Khristov³⁵ argues that the concept of disciplinary power offers ampler possibilities for understanding the functioning of socialism than the totalitarianism paradigm. The specific characteristics of power is the topic of a book by Dukhomir Minev and Petya Kabakchieva; they use elite theories to explain communism in terms of the total predominance of political power over all other spheres.³⁶ Ivaylo Dichev has proposed explanations based on the notion of the gift-exchange society, and the theories of Marcel Mauss, Claude Lévi-Strauss, and French psychoanalysis.³⁷ Communism has also been viewed in terms of consumption, lifestyle, and a kind of a modern consumerist project.³⁸ At the beginning of the twenty-first century, a number of publications conceptualized communism as a network society. In this respect there is a Bulgarian tradition of linking János Kornai's "deficit society," Pierre Bourdieu's "capitals," and Ivo Možný's "role of the family."³⁹ Even in the most recent analyses of the so-called "transition" as a network society, reference is made to the techno-economic networks defined by Michel Callon.⁴⁰ Recently there has been a noticeable return to the totalitarian paradigm in Ivaylo Znepolski's general conceptual framework of his latest book, *History of the People's Republic of Bulgaria*.⁴¹ Georgi Fotev similarly tried to prove the validity of the totalitarian paradigm by compiling testimonies and personal recollections of victims of repression.⁴²

What explains such a variety of conceptualizations? The first and easier explanation is that we, Bulgarian social scientists, have a doctrinaire approach to communism in accordance with our specific fields of interest and ideological

³³ Georgi Dimitrov, *Bulgariia v orbitite na modernizatsiia* (Sofia: UI "Sv. Kliment Ohridski," 1995).

³⁴ Andrei Bundzhulov, *Heterotopii* (Sofia: Kritika i humanizîm, 1996).

³⁵ Momchil Khristov, "Mishel Fuko i istoricheskata sotsiologîia na sotsializma," *Kritika i humanizîm* 29 (2009): 63–87.

³⁶ Dukhomir Minev and Petya Kabakchieva, *Prekhodit. Eliti i strategii* (Sofia: LIK, 1996).

³⁷ Ivaylo Dichev, *Darît v epokhata na negovata tekhnicheska vîzproizvodimost* (Sofia: LIK, 1999).

³⁸ Mila Mineva, "Razkazi i obrazi na sotsialisticheskoto potreblenie," *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 1–2 (2003): 143–65.

³⁹ See the texts by Andrei Raichev, Deian Deianov, and Andrei Bundzhulov in *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 1–2 (2003).

⁴⁰ Ivan Chalikov et al., *Mrezhite na prehoda: Kakvo vsîshnost se sluchi v Bîlgariia sled 1989* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2008).

⁴¹ Ivaylo Znepolski, ed., *Istoriia na Narodna Republika Bîlgariia. Rezhimît i obstestvoto* (Sofia: IIBM and CIELA, 2009).

⁴² Georgi Fotev, *Dîlgata nosht na komunizma v Bîlgariia* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2008).

standpoints, and, with seeming innocence, we force it into these schemas. There is probably some truth in this. Yet the wide variety of approaches merits serious analytical attention.

The second explanation seems to be of greater methodological significance. It is evident that all these paradigms ultimately raise the question whether the communist project is modern, premodern, or else a combination of the two.⁴³ This stems from the characteristics of the communist project, which is the transplantation of an ideology of the modern, industrialized West to the soil of an agrarian-type society in Russia. Thus, we have a West European Enlightenment project, specifically that of Marx, which was “implanted” in a specific agrarian-based premodern Russia, that of the “back-to-the-soil” thinkers. In turn, it was exported into other countries, some of which were Asiatic, others Balkan, still others Central European. But was communism the same in Soviet Russia as in Czechoslovakia, where the context was totally different? Did Hungarian and Bulgarian communism resemble each other much? Not to mention the comparison with Mongolia and China. We argue that we should make distinctions between the specific communist regimes according to the specific cultural heritage of the respective societies in which they were imposed, even though the common features of the dictatorship (in most cases *not* that of the proletariat) were preserved. In other words, the concrete “communisms” had particular features that require description and explanation,⁴⁴ regardless of the important common characteristics of the dictatorship, such as the abolishment of the market and the imposition of a single-party government. In a similar vein, a special issue of the journal *Sotsiologicheski problemi* was published in 2011 dedicated to “socialisms” in the plural. Its authors reflect upon the necessity to apply different theoretical approaches when trying to explain the socialist phenomenon, as well as the “diversities of socialisms.”⁴⁵

What are the theoretical concepts and approaches used to understand the developments in the various communist countries? Can we mechanically apply

⁴³ Mikhail Voslenski asserts that socialism is a “state monopoly feudalism of the Asiatic type” (*The Nomenklatura* (Sofia: Hristo Botev, 1993), vol. 2, 292), while the Hungarian scholars György Konrád and Iván Szelényi talk about a “quasi-feudal communist hierarchy” (*Intellectuals along the Road of Class Power*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1979).

⁴⁴ In fact, the postcommunist development of the former socialist countries clearly indicates the differences that had previously existed between them. After 1989, the seemingly monolithic “Soviet camp” broke down into several regions, each of which was different in its symbolic construction: there is the “Visegrad four,” Southeast Europe; in the former Soviet Union a clear difference emerged between the Baltic republics, the Central Asian republics, Russia, Ukraine, and Belarus.

⁴⁵ Special issue of *Sotsiologicheski problemi* (3–4 [2011]) focusing on “Socialisms Viewed under the Microscope,” edited by Darin Tenev and Momchil Khristov.

Western paradigms, created in a different social context, in order to conceptualize communism? Are these explanatory frameworks not yet another linguistic substitution for the actual life that goes on under these regimes? On the other hand, does focus on the particularities of the separate communist societies prevent broader generalizations? Considering that a separate field of postcolonial studies already exists, why shouldn't there be likewise a distinct field of post-communist studies? These methodological questions cannot be answered without conducting serious research on multiple aspects of life under communism in a comparative context. Only a comparative perspective would allow us to discern the common features of communist regimes, while at the same time keeping track of their specific manifestations in different countries.

Sociological and Anthropological Reconstructions of Specific Socialist Spheres and Groups

In more recent studies mostly from within sociology and anthropology,⁴⁶ the more general analyses of communism have given way to studies of concrete spheres or groups. The methods likewise vary: source and discourse analysis of official political directives, textbooks, and media, are frequently complemented by interviews. We review these works under this heading as distinct from the oral history rubric for they combine diverse methods with analysis of archives and interviews, unlike oral history which mostly focuses on narratives.

Everyday Life and Consumption

The sociologist Mila Mineva studies the narratives and images of socialist consumption and has recently been working on the retranslation of socialist consumption styles into present-day publicity messages.⁴⁷ Liliana Deyanova explores the appearance of consumption and standard of living as topics in Bulgarian social science journals in the 1970s.⁴⁸ The anthropologist Ilia Iliev adopts a similar approach, tracing the use of the concept of "mode of life" as a "practical tool for intervention by the state and the party."⁴⁹ The anthropologist Rositsa Guencheva studies the sale of Western goods in specialized hard-currency

⁴⁶ Although it should be noted that the distinctions between the various disciplines are becoming increasingly tentative.

⁴⁷ Mila Mineva, "Razkazi i obrazi na sotsialisticheskoto potreblenie"; idem, "Konsumatsiia, tozi politicheski obekt na zhelanieto," *Kritika i humanizim* 33, no. 3 (2010) 225–35.

⁴⁸ Liliana Deyanova, *Ochertaniia na mlchanieto* (Sofia: Kritika & Khumanizim, 2009).

⁴⁹ Ilia Iliev, "Local Uses of Three Soviet Ethnographic Concepts," in *Studying Peoples in the People's Democracies: Socialist Era Anthropology in East-Central Europe*, eds. Vintila Mihailescu, Ilia Iliev, and Slobodan Naumovic, Halle Studies in the Anthropology of Eurasia 17, vol. 2 (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2008).

stores, the so-called Corecom,⁵⁰ other texts by the same author are devoted to sounds and noise during socialism,⁵¹ and the images of the “West” in Bulgarian travel writing of the period.⁵² Ilia Iliev has a wonderful piece devoted to the role of grandmothers in urban life.⁵³

Here we should mention the interesting work by Georgi Gospodinov and Yana Genova, *Inventory Book of Socialism*,⁵⁴ which is something like a “picture book” or a museum contained in a book: it consists of photographs of various objects of everyday life under socialism, with a brief commentary for every picture. One could call this “artifact analysis,” a process which entails elaborating the hidden layers of social relationships behind the objects. The growing number of studies of everyday life and consumption has given rise to debates: the fervent critics of communism see in this research a trend toward the “normalization” of communism, concealing its extremes and responding to postcommunist nostalgia.⁵⁵ Studies on other spheres of social life have not provoked such ideological conflict, perhaps because they are more neutral, “beyond nostalgia, beyond hatred.”⁵⁶

Education, Textbooks, Science, Law, Urban Life

In this area, Pepka Boiadzhieva made a valuable contribution with her book on the communist state’s admission policies *vis-à-vis* higher education.⁵⁷ The role of school textbooks in the upbringing of children in the socialist system is the topic of two articles by Albena Hranova and Elena Stoikova.⁵⁸ The development

⁵⁰ Rossitza Guentcheva, “Mobile Objects: Corecom and the Selling of Western Goods in Socialist Bulgaria,” *Études Balkaniques* 1 (2009): 3–28.

⁵¹ Idem, “Sounds and Noise in Socialist Bulgaria,” in *Ideologies and National Identities: The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, eds. John Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest: CEU Press, 2004), 211–34.

⁵² Idem, “Images of the West in Bulgarian Travel Writing during Socialism (1945–1989),” in *Under Eastern Eyes: A Comparative Introduction to East European Travel Writing on Europe*, eds. Wendy Bracewell and Alex Drace-Francis (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2008), 355–78.

⁵³ Ilia Iliev, “Familie, Ideologie und Politik: Die Großmutter in der städtischen Familie nach 1945,” in *Vom Nutzen der Verwandten. Soziale Netzwerke in Bulgarien (19. und 20. Jahrhundert)*, eds. Ulf Brunnbauer and Karl Kaser (Vienna: Böhlau Verlag, 2001), 89–114.

⁵⁴ Yana Genova and Georgi Gospodinov, *Inventarna kniga na sotsializma* (Sofia: Prozorets, 2006).

⁵⁵ Concerning this discussion, see Svetla Kazalarska, “‘Detstvo moe realno i vîlshebno.’ Razkazi i spomeni za sotsialisticheskoto detstvo v muzeia,” in *Detstvoto pri sotsializma: Politicheski, institutsionalni i biografichni perspektivi*, eds. Ivan Elenkov and Daniela Koleva (Sofia: CAS and Riva, 2010), 167–78.

⁵⁶ This was also the apt title of a conference, organized in 2009 by the Goethe Institut.

⁵⁷ Pepka Boiadzhieva, *Sotsialnoto inzhenerstvo. Politiki za priem vîv visshite uchilishta prez komunisticheskiia rezhim v Bilgariia* (Sofia: IIBM, CIELA, 2010).

⁵⁸ Albena Hranova, “Das Kind in der Welt der Führer. Die bulgarische Kinderliteratur als Mittler eines Ideologems,” in *Geschichte (ge-)brauchen. Literatur und Geschichtskultur im Staatssozialismus: Jugoslawien und Bulgarien*, eds. Angela Richter and Barbara Beyer (Leipzig:

of academic disciplines in Bulgaria is analyzed in Svetla Koleva's excellent book on the institutionalization of the social sciences in socialist Bulgaria.⁵⁹ She subsequently edited a book of interviews conducted with sociologists, reflecting on the state of sociology during the communist period.⁶⁰ Ilia Iliev's study "Local Uses of Three Soviet Ethnographic Concepts" should also be mentioned in this context. Ivan Chalikov systematically investigates the technological advances during communism⁶¹ while Ivo Khristov looks at the specifics of Bulgarian law under socialism.⁶² There is also a study of urban life by Ivaylo Dichev, dealing with the settlement of the demographically predominant rural population into the cities, and another by Maia Grekova exploring the appearance of Roma ghettos in socialist cities.⁶³

Group Studies

The term "group studies" is not very precise, for the studies indicated below in fact investigate the particular ideological constructedness, and hence the institutionally based formation, of these groups. But since these works go beyond the analysis of the purely institutional logic of their creation and are mostly concerned with their life, attitudes, and memories, they are placed in the "group studies" category.

Some of these studies are devoted to professional groups. Among these Petya Slavova's book on architects and a study by Petya Kabachieva's on painters should be mentioned.⁶⁴ Childhood and children in socialism have been the

Frank & Timme, 2006), 179–90; Elena Stoikova, "Bukvarite prez sotsializma i sotsializmът prez bukvarite," *Kritika i humanizъм* 21 (2006): 291–308.

⁵⁹ Svetla Koleva, *Sotsiologiyata kato projekt. Nauchna identichnost i sotsialni izpitaniia v Bilgariia 1945–1989* (Sofia: Pensoft, 2005).

⁶⁰ Svetla Koleva, *Sotsiologiyata v Bilgariia prez pogleda na pokoleniyata (intervyuta s bilgarski sotsiologi)* (Sofia: Pensoft, 2012).

⁶¹ Ivan Tchalakov, "Industrial Development and Ecological Risks, 1945–1990," in *Bulgaria at the Crossroads*, ed. Jacques Coenen-Huther (New York: Nova Science, 1996), 245–58; idem, "Dilemmata der wissenschaftlichen und technologischen Entwicklung Bulgariens in der Zeit von 1950 bis 1980 (anhand einer empirischen Untersuchung der Optoelektronik)," in *Bulgarien im Übergang: sozialwissenschaftliche Studien zur Transformation/Bulgaria in Transition: Social Science Studies on the Political Transformation*, eds. Hans Leo Kraemer and Christo Stojanov (Bergisch Gladbach: Edwin Ferger Verlag, 1999), 51–77.

⁶² Ivo Khristov, *Bilgarski pravni metamorfozi* (Sofia: Zakhari Stoitinov, 2007).

⁶³ Ivaylo Dichev, "Usiadane na nomadskiiia komunizъм. Sotsialisticheskata urbanizatsiia i krigovete na grazhdanstvoto," *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 3–4 (2003): 33–63; Maia Grekova, *Romite v Bilgariia—ot izolatsiia kим integratsiia* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2008).

⁶⁴ Petya Slavova, *Les professions libérales pendant le socialisme: le cas des architectes en Bulgarie* (Sofia: St. Kliment Ohridski University Press, 2009); Petya Kabachieva, "Ot svoboda kим (ne)zavisimost: Bilgarskite hudozhnitsi v postkomunisticheskite usloviia (1986–2003)," in *Otvid disciplinarnite (samo) ograniicheniya*, eds. Maya Grekova and Petya Kabachieva (Sofia: Sofia University Publ. House, 2006), 174–94.

object of special interest. Svetlana Paunova and Kristina Popova have studied the role of the Pioneer organization in the socialization of children, while the collection of articles in the volume *Childhood under Socialism* deals with socializing institutions, as well as different approaches to childhood.⁶⁵ Similarly, Vera Staevska has analyzed the ideological construction of youth as a group, while Elena Stoikova explored the role of women in socialist times.⁶⁶

Oral History

Interest in oral history—narrated autobiographies, biographies, or life stories⁶⁷—started in the early 1970s. At first glance the interest was ideologically motivated: the first attempt at collecting autobiographies stemmed from an enquiry into the lives of the coevals of socialism—how were the people born on 9 September 1944 living thirty years later? This inevitably led to methodological debates. It all started with a collection of autobiographies of “coevals of socialism” from a small Bulgarian town: since very few people of that age were found, it was decided to conduct biographical interviews instead.⁶⁸ This new genre did not appear by chance; rather, it coincided with the introduction of concepts like “way of life” and “standard of living” in BCP official documents, and with the growing interest in the problems of everyday life—since biographical interviews inevitably tended to break open the ideological narrative and make room for the expression of everyday longings and problems.⁶⁹ During the period of late socialism, interest in qualitative methods was growing, including not only biographical interviews but also in-depth interviews with various groups. One example of such large-scale research was the unique monographic study of the members of the Union of Bulgarian Painters, carried out in 1986 by a team from the Department of Sociology at Sofia University, headed by Lyuben Nikolov, in the course of which 700 in-depth interviews with painters were conducted.⁷⁰

⁶⁵ Ivan Elenkov and Daniela Koleva, eds., *Detstvo pri sotsializma: Politicheski, institutsionalni i biografichni perspektivi* (Sofia: CAS and Riva, 2010).

⁶⁶ Elena Stoykova, “Ideological Construction of Women’s Roles in the Early Years of Socialism in Bulgaria,” *Sofia University Annual: Sociology* 96–98 (2007): 101–18; Vera Staevska, “From a Passive Force to a Dangerous Mind: Youth in the Bulgarian Communist Party’s Discourse,” *Sofia University Annual: Sociology* 99 (2008): 130–91.

⁶⁷ Bulgarian scholars use the concepts of *Biographieforschung*, *recits de vie*, or *oral history*, depending on the language they speak, and there is no serious debate regarding the possible different usages of these concepts.

⁶⁸ This project is described in Galia Misheva, “In Pursuit of Preserved Memory: The Popular Memory Project in Sofia,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: SSR, 2010), 275–92.

⁶⁹ An early example was the 1987 doctoral dissertation of Galia Misheva.

⁷⁰ An analysis of part of this rich archive can be found in Kabakchieva, “Ot svoboda kîm (ne)zavisimost.”

Immediately after the changes in 1989, interest in oral history gave way to heated ideological and conceptual debates, and the memoirs of well-known public figures appeared. It was only in the mid-1990s that interest in these methods was revived in academic circles (for instance, at the Departments of Sociology and Theory of History at Sofia University). In 1993 a research team at the present-day Research Centre for Social Sciences at the Department of Sociology conducted fifty-four in-depth interviews with representatives of the political elite of that time.⁷¹ In 1994, under the leadership of Elena Mikhailovska, researchers from the Department of Sociology at Sofia University, together with the French professor Daniel Bertaux, began to collect family narratives and family genealogies. The results of this project were presented at the international conference “Biography and Biographical Narratives” in Sozopol in 1995. In 1999, an international conference on oral history, “Talking History,” took place in Kiten.

Students from the Department of Theory and History of Culture at Sofia University began collecting life narratives in the mid-1990s in the framework of their fieldwork in anthropology. Consequently, a large number of oral biographical narratives were written down and collected in an archive. These stories, rather loosely structured around several general questions, offered a window into the socialist past of “ordinary people” living in villages, small towns, central district cities—people of various professions and social status. The autobiographies were published in a series of books; the latest one presents the autobiographical recollections of a class of history students in 1981.⁷² These archives stimulated professors in the department to reflect on biographical narratives and remembering: Raina Gavrilova, Krasimira Daskalova,⁷³ and especially Daniela Koleva, the most prominent specialist in the field of oral history. These approaches were influenced by the German *Alltagsgeschichte* and the methodology of Lutz Niethammer, in particular. Petăr Vodenicharov, Kristina

⁷¹ Idem, “The New Political Actors and Their Strategies,” in *Bulgaria at the Crossroads*, ed. Jacques Coenen-Huther (New York: Nova Science, 1996), 113–33; idem, “Die neuen politischen Eliten,” in Kraemer and Stojanov, eds., *Bulgarien im Übergang*, 117–45.

⁷² Vanya Elenkova and Daniela Koleva, eds., *Istorii na istoritsi. Biographichni razkazi—vipusk '81* (Sofia: Polis, 2012); Daniela Koleva, ed., *Virkhu khrastite ne padat mīlnii. Komunizmīt—zhitejski sīdbi* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, 2007); Vania Elenkova et al., eds., *Na megdana, na dvete cheshmi. Zhitejski razkazi ot s. Iskīr* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2004); Krasimira Daskalova et al., eds., *Tekhnite sobstveni glasove—intervyuta po ustna istoriia* (Sofia: Polis, 2003); Daniela Koleva et al., eds., *Slintseto na zalez pak sreshtu men: Zhitejski razkazi* (Sofia: LIK, 1999).

⁷³ Raina Gavrilova, “V tīrsene na izgubenoto minalo: konstruirane na alternativno minalo,” in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheteto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 345–61. In this text Raina Gavrilova investigates the relationship between remembering and the localization of the memories. See Daskalova et al., eds., *Tekhnite sobstveni glasove*.

Popova, and Angelina Pashova, professors at Blagoevgrad University, also have been collecting life histories, some of which have been published.⁷⁴

Starting in 2000 the interest in oral history has sharply increased. The two-volume *History Populated with People*, edited by Vera Mutaftchieva, consisted of interviews with various well-known public figures, mostly intellectuals. Georgi Gospodinov, Diana Ivanova, Rumen Petrov, and Kalin Manolov initiated an interesting project, compiling the most vivid recollections about socialism from people of different professions and ages. This book is commented upon both in this text and in Albena Hranova's article in the present volume. In Hranova's text one can find recollections by various researchers who had interviewed different groups. In 2009 the book *Testimonies* by Veselina Giuleva was published, presenting the life narratives of people who had suffered oppression from the so-called "people's government."⁷⁵

Currently in progress is the project "Models of Anxiety: Oral Biographies—Potential and Problems," headed by Alexander Kiosev and Daniela Koleva. It consists of a collection of oral narratives and identifies important methodological questions: "Is giving the floor to someone a matter of science or of politics? Who is the author? What do we actually learn? Whose truth do we learn?"⁷⁶

For the project "Remembering Communism," many life narratives and interviews with representatives of different groups were likewise collected and analyzed. At present Bulgarian scholars are vigorously compiling and analyzing oral narratives. The accumulated archive unquestionably bears the mark of the researchers who have provoked the narrators with certain questions. It contains a retrospective look, and in this sense it is both history as experienced by people then, as well as history as it is inflected by the present moment. In addition to the fact that these histories serve as a reference frame for the past as it has settled in the memories of people, they also present a methodological challenge to all who want to understand the processes of recollecting and the specific operations of memory.

⁷⁴ Petăr Vodenicharov, Kristina Popova, and Anastasiya Pashova, eds., *Iskam chovekîit da e vinagi priiaten i da si pravim moabet: Rechevo povedenie i zhizneni svetove na bîlgari mokhamedani v Gotsedelchevsko i Razlozhko* (Blagoevgrad: Sandra Book Trust, 1998); and the same editors published the book *Moeto dosie, pardon, biografîia. Bîlgarskite modernizatsii (30-te i 60-te godini)—ideologii i identichnosti* (Blagoevgrad: BOASO, 1999). Daniela Koleva gives a detailed account of the development and debates on oral history in "Ustnata istorîia i arkhivnata revolyutsîia i izuchavaneto na blizkoto minalo kato nauchna zadacha, politicheski zhest i moralen dîlg," in *Istoriia na Narodna Republika Bîlgariia. Rezhimîit i obstestvoto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: IIBM and CIELA, 2009), 646–60.

⁷⁵ Veselina Giuleva, *Svidetelstva* (Sofia: Iztok-Zapad, 2009).

⁷⁶ See <http://www.seal-sofia.org/bg/projects/current/patterns/Narrative/>.

Conceptualizing Memory: Historiography

Under this category we review texts dealing with how memory is “produced,” the battles waged over who will write the “official memory” and how; books that theorize about and depict the past (historiography); conceptualizations of the “sites of memory” (Pierre Nora), and analyses of the specifics of memory and oblivion. Since we cannot discuss each of these texts separately, they are presented in general, in terms of the main institutional and personal actors dealing with these theoretical fields.

To the best of our knowledge, the first to undertake the study of this topic were colleagues from the Institute of Critical and Social Investigations (ICSI):⁷⁷ Deian Deianov, Liliana Deyanova, Andrei Bundzhulov, Maia Grekova, Milena Iakimova, and others. They began with symbolic violence, traumatic places of memory, and the battles for symbolic legitimacy of the new elites. In a pioneering study, Liliana Deyanova studied the symbolic battles over the Georgi Dimitrov mausoleum and the traumatic places of collective memory, published for the first time in 1992 in *Brodie's Report*⁷⁸ and subsequently translated into English.⁷⁹ The ICSI has continued to analyze the rewriting of history, and particularly of high school history textbooks, which led to the publication of two books: *The Rewritings of the New Bulgarian History in High School Textbooks* (1995) and *National Identity in the Context of Transition: Historical Resources* (1997). These books introduced the concept of the “public space of history” which “does not consist of the spaces of shared memory, but of the shared spaces of memory ... on which the symbolic struggles are staked, the competing interpretations, the symbolic violence.”⁸⁰ Thus, key dates in history, like 9 September 1944 and 10 November 1989, are defined as shared spaces of memory, though subject to completely different interpretations. Subsequently, a team at ICSI launched the project “News from the Past: Weekly Newsreels in the Times of Socialism” (1999–2005). In it newsreels of the socialist period were digitized and thus a true visual archive of “news from the past” was formed. The historian Vania

⁷⁷ ICSI is an institute working actively in the field of socialism studies. Under its initiative a master's program on the historical sociology of socialism was introduced at Plovdiv University, and a special issue on this topic of the journal *Sociological Problems* is being prepared.

⁷⁸ Andrei Bundzhulov, ed., *Dokladit na Broudi (Godishnik na instituta za sotsialna kritika)* (Sofia: Kritika i Khumanizim, 1992).

⁷⁹ Liliana Deyanova, “The Battles for the Mausoleums: Traumatic Places of the Collective Memory,” in *Bulgaria at the Crossroads*, ed. Jacques Coenen-Huther (New York: Nova Science, 1996), 175–86.

⁸⁰ Liliana Deyanova, *Ochertaniia na milchanieto: Istoricheska sotsiologiia na kolektivnata pamet* (Sofia: Kritika i Khumanizim, 2009).

Stoianova has researched the images of communism in postcommunist cinema.⁸¹

The person dealing most actively and prolifically with the problems of memory, of remembering and forgetting, of shared recollections and traumas passed over in silence, is Liliana Deyanova. Her latest book, *The Outlines of Silence*, sums up her theoretical and empirical efforts in this field.⁸² She also guest edited a special issue of the Bulgarian journal *Sociological Problems* devoted to collective memory and biographical narratives.⁸³

Another important institutional actor that set the methodological and conceptual reference frame for reflection on memory was the House of Human and Social Sciences (HHSS), which grew into the Institute for Study of the Recent Past, headed by Ivaylo Znepolski. The institute conducted a series of conferences devoted to and attended by world-famous scholars working in this field. The papers delivered at the conferences were published by the HHSS under the editorship of Ivaylo Znepolski.⁸⁴ Through the prism of authors “around” whom the conferences and books are constructed, debates were undertaken on life as a narrative cohesion (Ricoeur), collective memory and the floodgates of memory (Koselleck), and sites of memory (Nora). Bulgarian scholars Ivaylo Ditchiev, Alexander Kiossev, Liliana Deyanova, Raina Gavriloova, and Daniela Koleva also published articles in these collections.

Elena Mikhailovska has likewise worked on the topic of memory for many years, exploring in particular what memory is and how it is mediated for various groups. In her book *The Culture of Survival*, she presents nine “life stories” of Bulgarian intellectuals, reflecting on questions such as: What helped people under socialism preserve their dignity?; What were the markers of their inner stability?; What were the invisible but conscious gestures of resistance? In other words, How did the “culture of survival” operate and maintain itself?⁸⁵ Evgenia Ivanova has also studied the problems of memory. Her book *The Bulgarian*

⁸¹ Vania Stoianova, “The Communist Period in Postcommunist Bulgarian Cinema,” in *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation*, ed. Maria Todorova (New York: SSRP, 2010), 373–91.

⁸² Liliana Deyanova, “Des condamnations locales du communisme à la Condamnation internationale de janvier 2006 (les guerres des élites bulgares pour le monopole de la mémoire du communisme),” in *Expérience et mémoire*, ed. Bogumil Jewciewicki and Erika Nimis (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), 193–213; idem, “Les manuels après la bataille. Les livres d’histoire nationale en Bulgarie après 1944 et après 1989,” *Histoire de l’éducation* 86 (2000): 171–86.

⁸³ Idem, “Kolektivna pamet i biografichni razkazi,” *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 3–4 (1998): 3–6.

⁸⁴ Paul Ricoeur: *Philosophy Facing the Challenges of Changes* (1998); *History, Narrative, Memory* (2001); *Around Reinhart Koselleck: Historical Time and Temporality* (2003); *Around Pierre Nora: Sites of Memory and Constructing the Present* (Sofia: HHSS, 2004). The same publishing house has translated two volumes of Pierre Nora’s *The Sites of Memory*.

⁸⁵ Elena Mikhailovska, *Pamet i prekhod* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Ohridski,” 1999); idem, *Kulturata na otseliavaneto* (Sofia: IK “Iztok-Zapad,” 2009).

Dissidents looks at the informal movements against communist power in the period 1988–1989. Recently she published the monograph *Inventing Memory and Oblivion*,⁸⁶ devoted to the construction of national memory among Serbs and Bulgarians. The latest publication in this line of research is the collective volume *The Bulgarian Twentieth Century*, with essays on different aspect of collective memory and national identity during socialism and postsocialism, written by anthropologists and historians.⁸⁷

Overall, at the beginning of the new century the number of books on socialism in Bulgaria has sharply increased: some of them present life histories, others analyze various aspects of the socialist system. As a result, historiographical studies are now emerging about the ways in which communism is described and conceptualized.⁸⁸

In conclusion, despite the great number of studies on communism, Bulgarian social scientists are still confronted with ambitious and complex challenges. On the one hand, they are expected to analyze and at the same time deconstruct the ideological discourse on communism. On the other hand, it is important for scholars to also reconstruct the memories about that society. Finally, they should attempt to produce a coherent conceptualization, even as their methodological frameworks might differ.

⁸⁶ Evgenia Ivanova, *Bilgarskite disidenti* (Sofia: NBU, 1997); idem, *Izobretiavane na pamet i zabrava* (Sofia: Nov bilgarski universitet, 2009).

⁸⁷ Ana Luleva, ed. *Bilgarskiiat XX vek. Kolektivna pamet i natsionalna identichnost* (Sofia: IK "Gutenberg," 2013).

⁸⁸ Roumen Daskalov, "Bilgarskiiat komunizim v istoriografiata," in *Istoriia na Narodna Republika Bilgariia. Rezhimët i obstestvoto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: IIBM and CIELA, 2009), 661–707; idem, *Ot Stambolov do Zhivkov: Golemite sporove za novata bilgarska istoriia* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2008), 295–446.

5. The Memory of Communism in Poland

Izabella Main

Introduction

Historical studies of the period of the Polish People's Republic (PRL) flourished after 1989 as a result of the newly gained freedom of scholarship and better access to the archives, as well as growing individual, public, and political interest in this topic. A vast number of books, papers, and memoirs have been published. However, a few valuable books dealing with communist history were published before 1989, either as samizdat in Poland, or abroad. While the communist period (1945–1989) itself has a broad bibliography, the issue of remembering communism¹ is less explored. This chapter is a modest attempt to explore the topic of memory and remembrance of communism in Poland. Five subfields related to the topic are proposed: sociological and historical studies of memory in general; studies about remembering the PRL; historical works of everyday life under communism; individual memoirs and oral history projects pertaining to the PRL period; and, finally, studies of “memory in the making,” such as celebrations, museums, and monuments. The main works within each subfield are reviewed, followed by a general overview of the state of the literature and the main historiographical, methodological or theoretical debates.

General and Introductory Studies of Memory

Sociological Studies of Memory

The first sociological studies, which were published in the 1960s, introduced new theoretical concepts as a result of empirical research. In 1963, Nina Asso-rodobraj-Kula published a paper entitled “Lived History, Historical Awareness: Symptoms and Research Proposals.” For her the concept of *lived history* (also

¹ The term “communism” is questioned in Polish historical writing and many scholars prefer the terms “state-socialism” or “socialism.” It is also common to use the name of the state: “PRL” in its various forms to designate the period (though the name actually covers the period 1952–1989).

called *historical awareness*) meant history which was important and active in contemporary social awareness. *Lived history* thus incorporated genealogical myths, legends, historical reconstructions and reenactments, the cult of the ancestors, theories of development, etc. Assorodobraj-Kula's theory inspired both further theoretical studies (e.g., of Józef Szacki on tradition) and research projects.² Also in the 1960s, Assorodobraj-Kula and Barbara Szacka, together with other researchers, conducted questionnaire-based studies of historical awareness and collective memory. Research projects from the 1970s, 1980s, and later led to a number of publications. Szacka published her work on collective memory in 1983 as *The Past in the Consciousness of the Polish Intelligentsia*. Between 1989 and 1990, three volumes based on research conducted during the socialist period were published by Szacka, Anna Sawisz, Andrzej Szpociński, and Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski under the series title "Studies of Historical Awareness." In the first volume, Szpociński analyzed the changing representations of Poland's past in historical radio dramas for primary school students in the period 1951–1984.³ Volume 2 was devoted to social frameworks of tradition exemplified by shifting perceptions of the history of the Mazowsze region in regional publications between 1918 and 1988,⁴ while volume 3 focused on changes of historical awareness among the Polish intelligentsia from 1965 to 1988.⁵

Discussions of collective memory reemerged in Poland in the 1990s as a result of the political and social changes in Eastern Europe, as well as the increased interest in the research of social memory in Western scholarship.⁶ In her paper "Systemic Transformation and Memory of the Past" Szacka proposed that all social transitions and systemic transformations were accompanied by changes in collective memory because images of the past play a significant role in legitimizing the current social order.⁷ According to her, the terms *collective memory* and *social memory* are ambiguous, endowed with different meaning by different scholars. Szacka understood *collective memory* as representations of a group's past, constructed by individuals out of remembered information generated from a variety of sources and received through different channels. This

² Joanna Filipowicz, "Pojęcie pamięci społecznej w nauce polskiej," *Kultura i historia* 2 (2002), <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/145>.

³ Andrzej Szpociński, *Przemiany obrazu przeszłości Polski. Analiza słuchowisk historycznych dla szkół podstawowych 1951–1984* (Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii UW, 1989).

⁴ Piotr Kwiatkowski, *Spoleczne ramy tradycji. Przemiany obrazu przeszłości Mazowsza Plockiego w publikacjach regionalnych 1918–1988* (Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii UW, 1990).

⁵ Barbara Szacka and Anna Sawisz, *Czas przeszły i pamięć społeczna* (Warszawa: Instytut Socjologii UW, 1990).

⁶ Piotr Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego w okresie transformacji* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2008), 13.

⁷ Barbara Szacka, "Systemic Transformation and Memory of the Past," *Polish Sociological Review* 118 (1997): 119–31.

information is understood, selected, and transformed according to the group's shared cultural standards and worldviews.

Between 2005 and 2009, four volumes were published by Szacka, Kwiatkowski, and Szpociński under the series title "Attitudes of Contemporary Polish Society toward the Past," offering comparative analysis based on research from the 1980s and subsequent decades. Particularly relevant is volume 2 by Kwiatkowski, which explores the collective memory of Polish society during the period of postsocialist transformation.⁸ Kwiatkowski points out several trends: the commercialization of the past, the popularity of historical reconstructions, the role of the family in remembering and forgetting the past and creating the discourse of the past, and changes in national memory. He concludes that there is a limited interest in critical discourses, as most people take an apologetic position toward Polish history: as a rule, knowledge about the sources of national pride is common and shared, which is not the case with sources of national disgrace. He also observes that there has been no substantial increase in the number of people interested in the past; however, there has been a significant change in the role of the past: tradition now has become one of the products to be promoted, sold, or consumed. After 1989 the attitude toward the past became more personal and direct. Historical topics such as the history of the Second World War became fashionable, encouraging popular engagement. Finally, there has been a boom in family history due to increased lifespan, changing cultural trends, and school-inspired interests (e.g., genealogy). Other volumes are more theoretical. In volume 1 the past was approached as the subject of transmission.⁹ While Szpociński discussed the meaning of "narrative" for the process of memory transmission, Kwiatkowski analyzed discourses about regional history. In volume 3 Szacka also engages with theoretical concepts, such as the relationship between the past and time and space.¹⁰ In volume 4 several authors discuss the broader theme of collective memory as a tool of integration and the source of conflicts.¹¹

Szpociński also edited *Toward the Past: Memory of the Past as an Element of Contemporary Culture* in 2005.¹² He proposes three dimensions of memory: (1) names of events, persons, cultural artifacts; (2) ideas, values, and norms of behavior related to these names; (3) objects and monuments evoking these events and persons. Dariusz Jarosz's analysis of public opinion polls from the

⁸ Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego*.

⁹ Andrzej Szpociński and Piotr Tadeusz Kwiatkowski, *Przeszłość jako przedmiot przekazu* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2006).

¹⁰ Barbara Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2006).

¹¹ Andrzej Szpociński, ed., *Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2009).

¹² Idem, ed., *Wobec przeszłości. Pamięć przeszłości jako element kultury współczesnej* (Warszawa: Instytut im. Adama Mickiewicza, 2005).

communist period argues that in spite of problems of bias and representativeness, these rich sociological sources should not be neglected by historians as they are extremely valuable for the study of urban life, work and industry, consumption, the market, mass culture, agriculture, public attitudes, and opinions about international politics and the army.¹³

Historical Studies of Memory

Bronisław Baczko in his *Social Images: Essays on Hope and Collective Memory*¹⁴ proposed a review of methodological problems and several historical case studies, such as Stalin's charisma, or the explosion of memory during the sixteen months of Solidarity's activity in 1980–1981. Baczko maintained that one of the functions of social imagination was to organize and control collective time on the symbolic level. Collective memory is deprived of value in totalitarian regimes, which try to manipulate the past and the present. He introduced the concept of *confiscated memory*, referring to events and persons omitted by the communist regime. He also paid particular attention to the importance of the historical symbols that were evoked during the Solidarity period. They aimed at providing the movement with an identity by omitting the negative aspects of Polish history. Although Baczko wrote his essay about the explosion of memory in 1982, this valuable study is relevant even today.

The topic of *regained memory* during the early 1980s was also explored by Marcin Meller, who produced a study on the role of history in the Solidarity movement.¹⁵ Meller analyzed the content of regained memory, the canon of Solidarity and the relation between identity and myth. He concluded that Solidarity had no concrete program but referred to a clearly defined historical and symbolic sphere that was very important for collective identification. The fact that Solidarity could freely use history meant that the regime had lost control over ideas and images about the nation's history as a source of legitimization.

Various aspects of the relationship between history and memory were analyzed by Marcin Kula. In a work on remembering and forgetting¹⁶ he reflected on questions related to how people perceive time in history: For how long is the

¹³ Dariusz Jarosz, "Sondaże OBOP w latach 1957–1989. Refleksje historyka," in *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały. Warsztat badawczy*, eds. Jerzy Eisler et al. (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2004), 65–96.

¹⁴ Bronisław Baczko, *Wyobrażenia społeczne. Szkice o nadziei i pamięci zbiorowej* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, 1994).

¹⁵ Marcin Meller, "Rola myślenia o historii w ruchu 'Solidarność' w latach 1980–1981," in *Solidarność w ruchu 1980–1981*, ed. idem (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza NOWA, 2000), 219–66.

¹⁶ Idem, *Miedzy przeszłością a przyszłością. O pamięci, zapominaniu i przewidywaniu* (Poznań: PTPN, 2004).

past important to them? How do they select what is important from the past? What do they prefer to forget and what do they keep in their memory? What kind of institutions and social movements are history-sensitive? What situations encourage people to think about the distant future that make them concentrate on the near future? The attitude of the communist movement and the communist states toward the past and the future constitutes an exceptionally important part of the author's analysis. Kula suggests that family memory and its transmission are decisive in constructing collective memory, yet often only positive facts from one's past are transmitted. In addition, other sources of information, and especially mass media, play an increasing role in creating collective memory. In a different study Kula focuses on analyzing objects and phenomena that carry historical meanings.¹⁷ To him, anything can be a carrier of historical memory: dates, songs, churches, graves, clothes, memoirs, monuments, museums, individual memory, art, films, photos. These carriers have different features: they can be autonomous, evolve, carry contemporary meanings, have different meanings for different people, be rediscovered, carry good and bad memories..

A different approach was proposed by Robert Traba in his book *History: The Space of Dialogue*.¹⁸ The first part is largely theoretical and devoted to such topics as collective memory, identity, the social frameworks of reading history, or the history of a city from a *longue durée* perspective. It offers an overview of the current debates in Polish historiography, at the same time criticizing historians for their reluctance to discuss new methodologies and the role of history in public discourse. Traba compared the sociological and historical approaches to the topic of memory, and proposed to use the concepts of social memory (following Maurice Halbwachs) and cultural memory (Jan Assmann) to analyze historical phenomena. In the second part of book he offers several case studies not directly related to the history and memory of communism, such as the political cult of the fallen, contemporary discussions about the mythologization of space (the borderlands, in particular), the celebrations of Grunwald, battle anniversaries, and a project of cemetery renovation in eastern Prussia.

The Reception of French and German Theories of Memory in Poland

Western theories of social memory were available but inadequately popularized in Poland. *Les cadres sociaux de la memoire* (1925, 1952) by Maurice Halbwachs was published in 1969, however the concept of collective memory was not in circulation. Jan Assmann's influential work *Cultural Memory and*

¹⁷ Idem, *Nośniki pamięci historycznej* (Warszawa: DiG, 2002).

¹⁸ Robert Traba, *Historia—przestrzeń dialogu* (Warszawa: Instytut Studiów Politycznych PAN, 2006).

Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination, originally published in 1982, was translated and published in Poland only in 2008. Pierre Nora's *Les lieux de mémoire* has not been translated into Polish to this day. In a rare exception, Kornelia Kończal in her paper "Close Encounters with History of the Second Degree"¹⁹ drew attention to the similarities between Asorodobraj-Kula's *lived history* and Aleida Assmann's *functional memory*, as well as Szacki's theories of *tradition* and Jan Assmann's *cultural memory*. In addition, Jacek Żakowski published a theoretical book containing a number of short interviews with philosophers and historians such as Paul Ricoeur, Pierre Nora, Yehuda Bauer, Charles S. Maier, Shlomo Avineri, Tomasz Szarota, and Adam Bień, wherein they addressed questions of responsibility, identity, changing memory in societies, and the memory of the Holocaust.²⁰ Overall, theories of cultural memory and *lieux de mémoires* were insufficiently popularized in Poland, although they were mentioned in the 1980s. Polish theorists and their elaborations were also virtually unknown in the West. Sociological work on historical consciousness and social memory was launched as early as the 1960s by a team of sociologists who conducted questionnaire-based research among different groups. Yet the results were published only in 1989–1990 in three volumes, entitled *Studies of Historical Awareness*. The subsequent four volumes added more theoretical reflection and empirical data about the attitudes of Polish society toward the past.

Studies about Remembering Communism in Poland

Research into the memory of the communist period is inextricably bound to the problem of the overall assessment of the period. One of the most important sociological studies on the memory of communism was undertaken by Piotr Kwiatkowski.²¹ His chapter "Polish Society's Memory of the PRL" gives an overview of the ongoing debates, the changes in assessment of the period, as well as the influence of the international context. Having conducted and analyzed focus group discussions in several cities, Kwiatkowski concludes that there is a nostalgia for the past (and not just for one's youth) for at least five reasons: (1) financial stability; (2) better prospects for self-realization; (3) the system of social welfare; (4) old forms of sociability contrasting with the high intensity and interpersonal competition after the changes; and (5) order, lower

¹⁹ Kornelia Kończal, "Bliskie spotkania z historią drugiego stopnia," in *Pamięć zbiorowa Pamięć zbiorowa jako czynnik integracji i źródło konfliktów*, ed. Andrzej Szpociński (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, 2009), 207–22.

²⁰ Jacek Żakowski, *Rewanż pamięci* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Sic!, 2002).

²¹ Kwiatkowski, *Pamięć zbiorowa społeczeństwa polskiego*, 312–53.

criminality, fewer scandals, a feeling of security at home and on the streets, as well as a positive image of the world in the mass media (even if false). At the same time, a critical memory of the PRL coexists and is related to the lack of freedom of speech, queues, shortages, poor service sector, conformism and lack of initiative, and, finally, the economic backwardness of the state. The study centers on individual experience, implying that the period of the PRL was a part of one's history and therefore it should be respected as part of overall Polish history. Such a perspective offers a way to cope with the memory of the recent past and a strategy to defend individual lives under communism as meaningful. Recollections and memories of the PRL constitute people's present identity. Elsewhere Kwiatkowski found a shifting attitude toward the experience and memory of martial law, introduced on 13 December 1981.²² Analyzing official public opinion polls, independent underground research projects, academic projects from the 1980s, as well as public opinion polls after 1990, he observed that in 1990 society ceased to blame Solidarity for the introduction of martial law, which was the case before 1989.

Szacka also offered interesting observations on the assessment of the period of the PRL in the third volume of the series "Polish Contemporary Society toward the Past."²³ He utilized public opinion polls and research conducted at the Institute of Sociology on the participation of respondents and their families in historical events, based on their conversations about history as the subject of shame and pride, and their assessments of the PRL. One result was that the Gierek period of the 1970s was evaluated more positively after 1989 than it was in 1987, while the period 1944–1948 was assessed less critically in 1987 than after 1989. Surprisingly, the legal activity of Solidarity was assessed negatively both in 1987 and 2003, perhaps because the majority of the respondents were not active in Solidarity and remembered the period mostly for its shortages, queues, stresses, and tensions. It is also likely that the negative opinion of Solidarity expressed in the communist propaganda was well imprinted in respondents' memories.²⁴

Several essays were published in two special volumes of the anthropological quarterly *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* in 2010 and 2011 addressing both theoretical and empirical issues. Barbara Magierowa and Antoni Kroh proposed several dictionary entries based on the analysis of newspapers and private memoirs.²⁵ The writer Marek Nowakowski also published a selection of dictionary entries, including terms such as "Konsumy," "Palace of Culture," and

²² Ibid., 355–439.

²³ Szacka, *Czas przeszły, pamięć, mit*.

²⁴ Ibid., 200.

²⁵ Barbara Magierowa and Antoni Kroh, "Życie trzeba czyli jak mieszkańcy miast radzili sobie w realiach PRL," *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 64, no. 4 (2010): 17–31.

“security services,” which he later incorporated into a book.²⁶ Other essays in this issue dealt with personal recollections of the PRL. The following issue of *Konteksty* included essays on memory, methodology, and everyday life. Marcin Brocki wrote about PRL nostalgia from a communicative perspective. Recollections serve as the point of departure for one’s own interpretations of the present-day situation.²⁷ Dobrochna Kałwa and Barbara Klich-Kluczevska wrote about the memory of everyday life in the peripheral town of Ustronie (Cieszyn Silesia). They conducted fieldwork collecting biographical narratives and analyzed the marginalization experienced by individuals. All this has resulted in an interesting contrast between microhistories and macroscale political history.²⁸

One of the enduring and most heated debates in Polish historiography remains the question of the application of the totalitarian paradigm. Sociologist Paweł Śpiewak offers an analysis of the debate among historians whether communist Poland was a totalitarian or authoritarian system in his book *Memory after Communism* (2005).²⁹ Historian Antoni Dudek discusses a number of historical issues and arguments over the character of the PRL in his collection *The PRL without Makeup*.³⁰ He maintains that this debate was the domain of politicians and journalists who employed the label “criminal communist totalitarianism” for current political goals, i.e., to settle accounts with the communist regime. For historians, however, the labeling was unimportant; it was the different research questions that mattered. Another important collection by historians, *A Dispute about the PRL*,³¹ was published in 1996 to question the totalitarian character of the state and the roles played by the state and society. The authors, who had personal experience of living under the PRL, emphasized an “us” versus “them” division in society, as well as an increasing feeling of normality among the majority of the population. The methodological problems of the debate also received due attention. In his paper “The Debate over the PRL,”³² Rafał Stobiecki poses the pertinent question of how historians are dealing with the situation, given that they are not only the guardians of memory, but also have a stake in defending their privileged position. Stobiecki argues that histori-

²⁶ Marek Nowakowski, “Mój słownik PRL (fragmenty),” *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 64, no. 4 (2010): 52–59; Nowakowski, *Mój słownik PRL-u* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2012).

²⁷ Marcin Brocki, “Nostalgia za PRL-em. Próba analizy,” *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 65, no. 1 (2011): 26–33.

²⁸ Dobrochna Kałwa and Barbara Klich-Kluczevska, “‘Codzienność peryferyjna.’ Pamięć o PRL mieszkańców Ustronia—studium przypadku,” *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 65, no. 1 (2011): 57–64.

²⁹ Paweł Śpiewak, *Pamięć po komunizmie* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2005).

³⁰ Antoni Dudek, *PRL bez makijażu* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 2008).

³¹ Piotr Wandycz, *Spór o PRL* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Znak, 1996).

³² Rafał Stobiecki, “Spór o PRL. Metodologiczne oblicze debaty,” *Kultura i historia* 2 (2002), <http://www.kulturaihistoria.umcs.lublin.pl/archives/80>.

cal works about the PRL are dominated by “a postpositivist cult of facts” and that there are many stereotypes and disagreements concerning the basic definitions and methodology

Memories of Social Groups and Objects in the PRL

The problem of memory-making among the gentry in Poland has been explored in detail by Longina Jakubowska in a number of papers based on archival material, interviews, and memoirs collected in the 1990s.³³ The author reflected upon the common characteristics of the recollections, such as the similarity of motives, the tendency to simplify, and the compression of time. Jakubowska’s main argument is that in the postcommunist context, the gentry countered the negative images created by the communist propaganda by creating a new self-image as a victimized social group with a positive historical role (high culture, a devotion to charity, justice, patriotism, work ethos, social responsibility) in their current battles to regain their property. Collective memory thus “continuously negotiates between available historical records, remembered experience, and current social and political agendas, selectively emphasizing, suppressing, and elaborating different aspects in the process.”³⁴

Social and economic changes as part of the memory of the PRL were analyzed by Jerzy Bartkowski and Joanna Kurczewska in a chapter on regional traditions wherein they maintained that the official history and memory often clashed with the perspective of everyday life.³⁵ The topic of the legacy of communism—both material and mental—was studied by Agnieszka Chmielewska in an article on collections of souvenirs and survivors from the past.³⁶ Souvenirs and mementoes from the time of the PRL are an important part of the collections for practical purposes: diplomas and documents serve to prove professional and social activity. However, many respondents expressed a negative attitude toward this period. Medals and badges are not valued because they in-

³³ Longina Jakubowska, “Memory-Making among the Gentry in Poland,” in *Memory and World War II: An Ethnographic Approach*, ed. Francesca Cappelletto (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 155–76; idem, “Między ideologią a praktyką reformy rolnej: pamięć ziemiaństwa,” in *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały*, ed. Krystyna Kersten (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 1999), 7–44; idem, “Morality, Rationality, and History: Dilemmas of Land Reprivatization in Poland,” in *Poland beyond Communism: Transition in Critical Perspective*, eds. Michał Buchowski et al. (Fribourg: University Press, 2001), 125–40.

³⁴ Jakubowska, “Memory-Making among the Gentry in Poland,” 175.

³⁵ Jerzy Bartkowski and Joanna Kurczewska, “Rola tradycji regionalnych i lokalnych w kształtowaniu nowych zróżnicowań,” in *Jedna Polska? Dawne i nowe zróżnicowania społeczne*, ed. Andrzej Kojder (Kraków: Wydawnictwo WAM, 2007), 513–32.

³⁶ Agnieszka Chmielewska, “Kolekcje pamiątek i niedobitki przeszłości—pamiątki rodzinne i pamięć rodziny,” in *Oblicza lokalności. Tradycja i współczesność*, ed. Joanna Kurczewska (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2004), 208–27.

dicating a high position in the PRL. Nevertheless, there are still collectors who zealously amass objects from this period. The memory and legacy of Solidarity was explored by several scholars in a collective volume *The Lessons of August: The Legacy of Solidarity*.³⁷ It starts from the premise that Solidarity was experienced and thought through by a few generations. In the introduction Wojciech Karpiński argues that Solidarity was transformed from an open social movement organized as a community into a movement divided between elites and masses, driven by competition. Jerzy Cichoński explored the experience of Solidarity and concluded that Solidarity is either presented as a miracle (with the emphasis on religious and evangelical meanings) or as civil society. For Dudek, Solidarity was first and foremost a workers' and national liberation movement.

Historical Works about Everyday Life under Communism

The most important book series concerning the social, economic, cultural, and political history of Poland under communism is "In the Land of the Polish People's Republic." The majority of the individual volumes originate from doctoral dissertations or master's theses. For the purposes of the present review, only selected volumes are discussed, in particular the ones pertaining to everyday life, social and cultural history, and memory. One of the pioneering histories of everyday life is Ewelina Szpak's study of the collective farms in the northwestern territories of Poland and in Małopolska, in the south.³⁸ Using archival documents, interviews, memoirs, and newspaper articles, Szpak explores the origins of collective farming, space and time on the farms, farmers' work, leisure, housing, and family life. Starting from the question of whether a collective farm community was different from other communities (e.g., workers and individual farmers), Szpak concludes that the features of a collective farm merged with those of old house farms with the outcome being a continuum of attitudes and behaviors.

Barbara Klich-Kluczeńska explored everyday life in an urban setting in her volume on the private life of the inhabitants of Krakow.³⁹ Using an interesting selection of sources—memoirs, recollections, letters, essays written for a literary competition about neighborhoods, narrative interviews, photos, films, records, and the press—she narrates Krakow's postwar history through the lens of

³⁷ Dariusz Gawin, ed., *Lekcja Sierpnia. Dziedzictwo "Solidarności" po dwudziestu latach* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo IFiS PAN, 2002).

³⁸ Ewelina Szpak, *Między osiedlem a zagrodą. Życie codzienne mieszkańców PGR-ów* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2005).

³⁹ Barbara Klich-Kluczeńska, *Przez dziurkę od klucza. Życie prywatne w Krakowie (1945–1989)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2005).

childhood, engagement and marriage, private choices and leisure time, and private spaces. The author is particularly interested in finding the line between private and public spheres, and exploring the impact of the communist system on private life and mentalities. She argues that the state used various institutions in order to influence people, yet its impact was limited mostly to the younger generations (due to schooling and habitation in large apartment complexes). The changes in leisure practices and private activities were more the result of larger historical changes (cultural, technological) than of communist propaganda.

Patryk Pleskot similarly explored leisure and everyday life under communism by using television as a prism.⁴⁰ In his book on the impact of television on everyday life, he argues that television—unlike the radio, press, and cinema—was not seen by the party officials as a good propaganda tool in the 1960s. Rather, it was perceived as a tool to disseminate and propagate culture. It was only in the 1960s that the role of television shifted and it started to have direct impact on everyday life, their leisure time was reorganized, and television became a substitute for cinema, theater, and sports. This change led to standardization and homogenization of broadcasts with the outcome that some behaviors became more uniform, society was more integrated, new topics of discussion emerged, and children were engaged in new forms of play.

Another cluster of works focused on daily life in factories. Błażej Brzostek studied existence and conflicts in Warsaw factories between 1950 and 1954.⁴¹ The author's main conclusion is that workers' resistance to the Stalinist regime was very limited due to fear, the diversity of workers, the memory and experience of the war (which created favorable conditions for adaptation), everyday problems with communication and shopping (which took time and energy), the existence of groups which supported the regime, and the unifying experience of rebuilding the city of Warsaw. In another study Brzostek described daily life in Warsaw between 1955 and 1970.⁴² Daily life in two socialist factories in the 1960s was analyzed by Małgorzata Mazurek.⁴³ She studied the J. W. Stalin electrical equipment works in Treptow, Berlin, and the Rosa Luxemburg electric lamp factory in Warsaw, focusing on work conditions. Małgorzata Fidelis wrote a study on female workers and communist politics in Poland.⁴⁴ She ex-

⁴⁰ Patryk Pleskot, *Wielki mały ekran. Telewizja a codzienność Polaków w latach sześćdziesiątych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007).

⁴¹ Błażej Brzostek, *Robotnicy Warszawy. Konflikty codzienne (1950–1954)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2002).

⁴² Idem, *Za progiem. Codzienność w przestrzeni publicznej Warszawy lat 1955–1970* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007).

⁴³ Małgorzata Mazurek, *Socjalistyczny zakład pracy. Porównanie fabrycznej codzienności w PRL i NRD u progu lat sześćdziesiątych* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2005).

⁴⁴ Małgorzata Fidelis, *Women, Communism and Industrialization in Postwar Poland* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

explored how communist leaders and society adapted precommunist traditions and patterns of work and life to new forms imposed by communist ideology. The study is based on archival materials, letters to the press, and interviews. Her book is an exceptional case of historical writing using the perspectives of gender history. She also published a number of articles on women's history, both in English and Polish.

The private and official life of youth under communism was analyzed by Krzysztof Kosiński.⁴⁵ His book is structured around three rubrics: the rulers (the regime, the church, and the West), official life (the school, language, celebrations, official space), and private life (the family, secret life, leisure time, music, language, fashion). Focusing on mainstream trends and typical youth behavior (leaving out elites and hooligans), the author reaches several conclusions: (1) subsequent generations created their own style; (2) there was a convergence of youth culture (fashion, language, enjoyment and entertainment, relations with parents) mostly due to schooling; (3) the youth was a-systemic: it was neither for nor against the system, but indifferent; (4) there was a pervading sense of cognitive dissonance, i.e., multiple parallel situations, such as school, religious class, and entertainment, led to withdrawal, awareness of a lack of prospects, and feeling that one was unable to have impact on reality. Sowiński zoomed in on vacations in communist Poland—both in terms of state policy and tourism.⁴⁶ Some of the themes he explores are organized and individual holidays, holidays and work, holidays and society, holidays and ideology, holidays abroad, and commercial tourism (parasite tourism). Mass interest in holidays was more the result of state protectionism than of an increase in society's wealth (as was the case in the West). Individual tourism, thus, became possible only after 1956 when state hegemony and efficiency decreased and people expressed the need for holidays more strongly. In addition, Sowiński found that physically nonactive recreation was more common among workers, while active, company-organized holidays and individual tourism were the prerogative of the more educated persons. Tourism was also linked to the second economy, smuggling, currency speculations, working illegally, and emigration. Dariusz Stola wrote a book about migration from Poland between 1949 and 1989 entitled *A Country with No Exit*.⁴⁷ He described the gradual change "from static immobility to movement on a massive scale," which corresponded to social and political changes in the society and the regime. The popular stereotype of "a country

⁴⁵ Krzysztof Kosiński, *Oficjalne i prywatne życie młodzieży w czasach PRL* (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2006).

⁴⁶ Paweł Sowiński, *Wakacje w Polsce Ludowej. Polityka władz i ruch turystyczny (1945–1989)* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2005).

⁴⁷ Dariusz Stola, *Kraj bez wyjścia? Migracje z Polski 1949–1989* (Warszawa: IPN, ISP PAN, 2010).

with no exit” is challenged; the author used diverse sources to show that around two million Poles left their country.

Schooling was the subject of a number of studies. Marta Brodala wrote about school propaganda for the youngest during the Stalinist period, describing children’s upbringing, policies for the youngest, the image of Poland, friends and enemies, heroes, atheism and new worldviews.⁴⁸ Similarly, Kosiński studied the process of Stalinization in schools by juxtaposing the goals and policies of the regime with school reality.⁴⁹ His conclusion is that many aspects of the new order were introduced for the sake of appearances and did not lead to actual changes of attitudes and beliefs. Zofia Wóycicka analyzed debates about the commemoration in former Nazi camps in Poland between 1944 and 1950.⁵⁰ The commemorations of the Second World War by a veteran organization was studied by Joanna Wawrzyniak in a published doctoral dissertation.⁵¹

Andrzej Krzywicki investigated in detail the Fifth World Festival of Youth and Students, which had the motto “For Peace and Friendship—Against the Aggressive Imperialist Pacts,” organized in Warsaw in 1955.⁵² In a book on state and religious holidays in Lublin between 1944 and 1989, Izabella Main compared celebrations of various national, communist, and Catholic holidays, their social perception, and the meanings attached to them by ordinary men.⁵³ Bartosz Kaliski published a book on the First National Convention of Solidarity Delegates in 1981.⁵⁴ Coming from within a sociological perspective, he discussed social movements, the debates at the convention on economic policy, and the voices of experts.

Several studies focused on movies and their portrayal of society. Dorota Skotarczak argued that comedies can be utilized for researching social transformations.⁵⁵ She showed the extent to which comedy may be a reflection of

⁴⁸ Marta Brodala, “Propaganda dla najmłodszych w latach 1948–1956. Instrument stalinowskiego wychowania,” in *Przebudować człowieka. Komunistyczne wysiłki zmiany mentalności*, ed. Marcin Kula (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2001), 15–202.

⁴⁹ Krzysztof Kosiński, *O nowa mentalność. Życie codzienne w szkołach 1945–1956* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2000).

⁵⁰ Zofia Wóycicka, *Przerwana żaloba. Polskie spory wokół pamięci nazistowskich obozów koncentracyjnych i zagłady 1944–1950* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2009).

⁵¹ Joanna Wawrzyniak, *ZBoWiD i pamięć drugiej wojny światowej 1949–1969* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2009).

⁵² Andrzej Krzywicki, *Poststalinowski karnawał radości. V Światowy Festiwal Młodzieży i Studentów o Pokój i Przyjaźń* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007).

⁵³ Izabella Main, *Trudne świętowanie. Konflikty wokół obchodów świąt państwowych i kościelnych w Lublinie w latach 1944–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2004).

⁵⁴ Bartosz Kaliski, “Antysocjalistyczne zbiorowisko”? I Krajowy Zjazd Delegatów NSZZ Solidarność (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2003).

⁵⁵ Dorota Skotarczak, *Obraz społeczeństwa PRL w komedii filmowej* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, 2004).

changes in mentality, customs, and awareness of the people for whom it is made, and, at the same time, the degree to which it remains a product of political calculations. During the communist period, filmmaking in Poland had to comply with the ideological principles laid by the authorities. One of the conclusions is that comedy, owing to its role as a safety valve, remained the one genre capable of depicting the real conditions of life to a considerable extent. Monika Talarczyk-Gubała wrote about changes in the comedy genre against the background of social and political relations.⁵⁶ According to her, comedy could have several functions: regulatory, therapeutic, ludic, integrative, and as a safety valve. The present popularity of communist-era comedies results from the temporal distance (for teenagers) and nostalgia (for older people), which eliminate ethical considerations.

The comparative volume, *Socialism in Everyday Life: Dictatorship and Society in the PRL and East Germany*, approached daily life from the perspective of microhistory.⁵⁷ The authors of this collection, which emerged from a conference, sought to address a number of stimulating questions: What was characteristic of communism in comparison to the West and to the precommunist period? Which changes were intended and which ones happened by chance? Which characteristics were inherent and which were introduced from the Soviet Union? What impact on reality did the promoted peasants and workers have? The thematic scope of the book is impressive: the factory as a place of work and daily life, the school as a place of socialization and education, the district and neighborhood as spaces of social life and political influences, and foreign countries as economic and social partners. One of the authors' conclusions is that research about communism in Germany and Poland was first made in response to political demands. While the political situation in Germany prompted a very fast opening of German archives, in Poland the circumstances were different as negotiations between post-Solidarity and postcommunist forces was underway. Although the initial goal of the opening of the archives was to "condemn communism," eventually it led to the emergence of several serious studies with conclusions far more complicated than expected. Grzegorz Miernik and Sebastian Piątkowski edited a volume on daily life in Poland between 1956 and 1989 covering the daily life of workers (Jędrzej Chumiński), housing problems (Dariusz Jarosz), children and youth vacations (Wanda Królikowska), militia members in the PRL (Wiktor Milusiński), or the hippie movement (Maciej Chlopek).⁵⁸ Sev-

⁵⁶ Monika Talarczyk-Gubała, *PRL się śmieje. Polska komedia filmowa lat 1945–1989* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2007).

⁵⁷ Sandrine Kott, Marcin Kula, and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Socjalizm w życiu powszednim. Dyktatura a społeczeństwo w NRD i PRL* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Trio, 2006).

⁵⁸ Grzegorz Miernik and Sebastian Piątkowski, eds., *Życie codzienne w PRL (1956–1989)* (Radom-Starachowice: Radomskie Towarzystwo Naukowe, 2006).

eral interesting papers on everyday life in the years 1945–1955 were also published in volume 5 of the eight-volume series *Poland 1944/45–1989: Studies and Materials* about the sounds of Warsaw (by Brzostek), company holidays (by Jarosz), humor (by Szarota), daily life in prison (by Tadeusz Wolsza), and religious life (by Jan Żaryn).⁵⁹

Several trends become apparent upon surveying the scholarly literature on daily life under communism. First, the vast majority of works covers the first two decades of the communist period, perhaps due to archival restrictions on the documents produced during the last thirty years. Second, the main sources utilized by authors are official documents (produced by the Party, various offices, schools, factories, the Catholic Church). Some authors have also resorted to the press, published memoirs from the period, and essays written for various literary competitions. Interestingly, few authors have employed interviews as historical sources, perhaps mostly due to lack of methodological skills. This situation remains in contradiction with the large amount of published memoirs and increasingly available collections of interviews, gathered within oral history projects, which are outlined in the next part.

Memoirs, Recollections, and Oral History Projects about the PRL

Memoirs, recollections, and stories from the communist period may be divided into several categories with regard to their authors: political elites (people of the regime, opposition activists, church leaders), cultural and intellectual elites (writers, historians, musicians), people unified by a specific experience (e.g., expellees), and “common people.” Czesław Robotycki in his essay “The Memory of PRL”⁶⁰ suggested that statements about the past and references to one’s own memory are common both as a subject of analysis and as a source of evidence among scholars. Yet, these sources raise methodological problems when scholars use them without the necessary distance in order to generalize from their own personal experiences.

The political elites have been authors and subjects of many interviews and biographies. “*Them*” *Stalin’s Polish Puppets*, a well-known collection of interviews, was published by Teresa Torańska in 1984 and was translated into English in 1987.⁶¹ It contains interviews conducted in 1981–1984 with five formerly prominent Polish communists (Edward Ochab, Jakub Berman, Roman Werfel,

⁵⁹ Jerzy Eisler et al., eds., *Polska 1944/45–1989. Studia i materiały. Życie codzienne w Polsce 1945–1955*, vol. V (Warszawa: Instytut Historii PAN, 2001).

⁶⁰ Czesław Robotycki, “Pamięć o PRL,” *Konteksty: Polska Sztuka Ludowa* 57, no. 3–4 (2003): 66–70.

⁶¹ Teresa Torańska, “*Them*” *Stalin’s Polish Puppets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987).

Stefan Staszewski, and Julia Minc, the wife of Hilary Minc). Torańska questioned them about the harsh realities of the period, Soviet control, repression, and many other topics. The answers revealed both their mentality as loyal Stalinists (still loyal, for the most part, despite all the subsequent events) and the political issues and struggles of that time, including the dramatic events of June 1956. In 2006, Torańska published *Bygones*—interviews with former leaders and party supporters about their access to and exercise of power, propaganda, the struggle with the church, culture, and relations with the Soviet Union.⁶²

Edward Gierek, the first secretary of the Polish United Workers' Party in the 1970s, was the first leader to agree to an interview in 1990, and he also published a sequel, as well as his memoirs in 1993.⁶³ One of his advisors, Zdzisław Rurarz, wrote a book about his experiences.⁶⁴ The last first secretary, Wojciech Jaruzelski, published a number of books about his political activities. Mieczysław Rakowski, prime minister in 1988–1989, member of the Central Committee since 1957, and editor-in-chief of the journal *Polityka* since 1958, published ten volumes of memoirs.⁶⁵ General Czesław Kiszczak, minister of the interior in the 1980s and a long-term member of counterintelligence, was similarly interviewed by Bereś and Skoczylas about his political activity. Leaders of the anti-communist opposition also wrote about their lives and activities.⁶⁶ Lech Wałęsa published *A Way of Hope* in 1989, *The Way to Freedom* in 1991, and recently the autobiography *The Way to Truth*.⁶⁷ Several other opposition activists also published biographies or personal stories: Jacek Kuroń,⁶⁸ Bronisław Geremek,⁶⁹ the Czuma brothers,⁷⁰ the Gwiazda family,⁷¹ Father Tadeusz Isakowicz-

⁶² Idem, *Byli* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2006).

⁶³ Janusz Rolicki, ed., *Edward Gierek: przerwana dekada* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1990); idem, ed., *Edward Gierek: replica* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1990); Edward Gierek, *Smak życia. Pamiętniki* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1993).

⁶⁴ Zdzisław Rurarz, *Bylem doradcą Gierka* (Warszawa: Andy Grafik, 1990).

⁶⁵ Mieczysław Rakowski, *Dzienniki polityczne 1958–1990* (Warszawa: Iskry, 1999–2005).

⁶⁶ Witold Bereś and Jerzy Skoczylas, *General Kiszczak mówi... prawie wszystko* (Warszawa: Polska Oficyna Wydawnicza BGW, 1991).

⁶⁷ Lech Wałęsa, *Droga nadziei* (Kraków: Znak, 1989); idem, *Droga do wolności* (Warszawa: Editions Spotkania, 1991); idem, *Droga do prawdy* (Warszawa: Świat Książki, 2008).

⁶⁸ Jacek Kuroń, *Autobiografia* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Krytyki Politycznej, 2009); idem, *Wiara i wino. Do i od komunizmu* (Warszawa: Niezależna Oficyna Wydawnicza, 1990); idem, *Glaube und Schuld: einmal Kommunismus und zurück* (Berlin Aufbau-Verlag, 1991).

⁶⁹ Bronisław Geremek and Jacek Żakowski, *Rok 1989: Geremek opowiada, Żakowski pyta* (Warszawa: Agora, 2008).

⁷⁰ Hubert Czuma et al., *Wspomnienia z PRL* (Katowice: Sekretariat Górnictwa i Energetyki NSZZ "Solidarność," 1996).

⁷¹ Joanna Duda-Gwiazda, Andrzej Gwiazda, and Remigiusz Okrasa, *Gwiazdowski w "Solidarności"* (Łódź: Obywatel, 2009).

Zaleski,⁷² and many others. Torańska zoomed in on opposition leaders in her book *We*: Leszek Balcerowicz, Jan Krzysztof Bielecki, Jacek Merkel, Wiktor Kulerski, Jarosław Kaczyński, Piotr Szczepanikiem, and Janem Rulewskim. Similarly, Lipski wrote a book about the Committee for Workers' Defense (an oppositional organization he was actively involved in), wherein he gave a personal account of the committee's history.⁷³

Women in the opposition movement were the subject of a book by American journalist Shana Penn who visited Poland in the early 1990s and interviewed opposition activists Anka Grubińska, Barbara Labuda, Ewa Kulik, Małgorzata Tarasiewicz, Helena Łuczywo, Anna Dodziuk, Anna Bikont, Joanna Szczęsna, and Teresa Bogucka about their roles in the Solidarity movement.⁷⁴ Penn especially showed how the roles of the women in the opposition were diminished and forgotten both by men and women due to gender stereotypes and language.

The classic book on the position of writers in communist Poland is *Domestic Disgrace*⁷⁵ by Jacek Trznadel, published in 1986 in Paris by the Literary Institute. The author conducted interviews with writers about their position in the Stalinist period. In *Avalanche and Stones: Writers toward Communism* (2006), Bikont and Szczęsna similarly compiled a collection of interviews asking questions about the postwar choices of Polish writers who first supported the regime, but subsequently joined the ranks of the opposition.⁷⁶ The main focus is on the motivation for writers' actions—were they driven by the lust for power and money, or by the same values that later were decisive in turning them into the opposition?

Kamil Sipowicz wrote an autobiographic book about the hippie movement in communist Poland. Utilizing his own recollections, as well as interviews with other former hippies, he sought to demonstrate that the image of the movement propagated by the communist regime was false.⁷⁷ Graffiti in the PRL is the subject of a recent album⁷⁸ published by the Institute of National Remembrance. The album presents examples of independent culture contesting the communist state. The graffiti artists mocked the regime and its activists protested against

⁷² Tadeusz Isakowicz-Zaleski, *Moje życie nielegalne* (Kraków: Znak, 2008).

⁷³ Jan Józef Lipski, *KOR—Komitet Obrony Robotników, Komitet Samoobrony Społecznej* (Warszawa: IPN, 2006; 1st ed., 1983).

⁷⁴ Shana Penn, *Podziemie kobiet* (Warszawa: Rosner & Wspólnicy, 2003); idem, *Solidarity's Secret: The Women Who Defeated Communism in Poland* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ Jacek Trznadel, *Hańba domowa* (Paryż: Instytut Literacki, 1986).

⁷⁶ Anna Bikont and Joanna Szczęsna, *Lawina i kamienie. Pisarze wobec komunizmu* (Warszawa: Prószyński i S-ka, 2006).

⁷⁷ Kamil Sipowicz, *HiPisi w PRL-u* (Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Baobab, 2008).

⁷⁸ Ewa Chabros and Grzegorz Kmita-Patyczak, eds., *Graffiti w PRL* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej, 2011).

the army levy, environmental problems, and other social issues. The book explores the history of Polish graffiti, the artists involved, and the measures taken against them by the security service. One of the editors was himself a witness and graffiti artist in the 1980s.

A few interesting studies were published by anthropologists in an edited volume *The Polish People's Republic from Memory*.⁷⁹ The book offers an analysis of selected aspects of the everyday life under communism, based on recollections. Andrzej Delorme wrote an essay about the grayness of life under communism. A number of social and professional groups also contributed their personal recollections about their life under communism, such as members of the Academic Sports Association⁸⁰ and historians, such as Henryk Samsonowicz, who wrote about his life, his friends, and his colleagues.⁸¹ (Interestingly, Samsonowicz advised that his "testimony should be treated with caution"—as a specialist in medieval history, he felt that there is, in his opinion, no worse source than a personal recollection.)⁸²

The experience of expulsion has also been treated in a variety of books, thematically ranging from the expulsion and resettlement of women in communist Poland,⁸³ to the everyday life of Masurians and Warmians,⁸⁴ to the expulsion of Jews after the 1968 anti-Semitic campaign.⁸⁵ Some of the main themes explored in these works are uprooting, politics and daily life, the context of expulsion, motivations for emigration, recovered memory, and present attitudes to such abrupt changes in lifestyle. The recollections of the repressed by the communist regime are mostly published by the Institute of National Remembrance (IPN) and various victims' associations. The IPN published a special series "Relations and Recollections," and the Association of the Political Prisoners of the Stalinist Period issued several recollections about prison life, as well as life after release.⁸⁶ The IPN similarly collected and published the recollections of opposition members (editors, writers, lawyers, printers, priests) from the time of mar-

⁷⁹ Czesław Robotycki, ed., *PRL z pamięci. Prace etnograficzne*, vol. 36 (Kraków: Wydawnictwo UJ, 2001).

⁸⁰ Ryszard Wryk, ed., *Sport akademicki w relacjach i wspomnieniach* (Poznań: Wydawnictwo Poznańskie, 2009).

⁸¹ Andrzej Sowa, *Henryk Samsonowicz, świadek epoki: wywiad—rzeka* (Warszawa: Bellona, 2009).

⁸² *Ibid.*, 67.

⁸³ Anna Lipowska-Teutsch and Halina Grzymała-Moszczyńska, eds., *Kobiety wędrownie* (Kraków: Towarzystwo Interwencji Kryzysowej, 2008).

⁸⁴ Hans-Jürgen Karp and Robert Traba, eds., *Codziennosc zapamiętana. Warmia i Mazury we wspomnieniach* (Olsztyn: ISP PAN, Borussia, 2004).

⁸⁵ Teresa Torańska, *Jesteśmy: rozstania '68* (Warszawa: Świat Książki 2008).

⁸⁶ Stanisław Dziurzyński and Kazimierz Borkowski, *Ofiary terroru stalinowskiego mówią* (Radom: Komisja Historyczna Oddziału Radomskiego ZWPOS, 2000).

tial law.⁸⁷ It should be noted, however, that these recollections were compiled more than twenty years after the events of 1981–1983, hence researchers mostly focused on repression and opposition, often siding with right-wing politicians and the proponents of vetting, and maintained the view of the PRL as a totalitarian regime.

Several oral history projects were announced by the Karta Center, the oldest center for researching the recent history of Poland and Eastern Europe. It is the successor to the illegal group that published the journal *Karta* and started the clandestine Eastern Archives in the 1980s. For more than two decades now the Center has been collecting and publishing thousands of biographical accounts, as well as annual competition essays by secondary school students on contemporary historical problems. The Karta Center also supported a project “Remembering the Polish People’s Republic” (*Pamiętanie Peerełu*) which aimed at collecting individual stories about various aspects of daily life and dissent among common people.⁸⁸ The interviews were published online and a few volumes are in preparation. Another nongovernmental organization, Theatre NN in Lublin, has also launched oral history projects and made them available online.⁸⁹ They documented the memory of the region, including its Jewish past, as well as the most important events, places, and persons. One of the topics was 4 June 1989, the first semi-free parliamentary elections that led to the historical changes.

Memory in the Making—Celebrations, Museums, Monuments

The literature on museums, monuments, and celebrations related to the communist period is relatively scarce. It is predominantly the press that reports about them, usually in just a few sentences. Initiatives to create museums and exhibitions, as well as to erect new monuments, are described in several analytical papers. Izabella Main’s “How Is Communism Displayed?”⁹⁰ offers a general overview of a number of initiatives, such as the exhibitions held in Kozłówka near Lublin, the Ethnographic Museum in Warsaw, the Karta Center, and the IPN; the design of the Proletaryat Café in Poznań, and the launching of the Internet Museum of People’s Poland. Similarly, the project of the SocLand Mu-

⁸⁷ Janusz Krupski et al., eds., *Świadectwa stanu wojennego* (Warszawa: Instytut Pamięci Narodowej. Komisja Ścigania Zbrodni przeciwko Narodowi Polskiemu, 2006).

⁸⁸ See <http://www.pamietaniepeerelu.pl/>.

⁸⁹ See <http://tnn.pl/pamie.php>.

⁹⁰ Izabella Main, “How Is Communism Displayed? Exhibitions and Museums of Communism in Poland,” in *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, eds. Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (Budapest: CEU Press, 2008), 371–400.

seum of Communism was described in detail in an illustrated volume⁹¹ in an effort to examine the attitudes toward the authenticity of objects, and the narratives constructed behind exhibitions.

Arnold Bartetzky includes a few Polish case studies in his comparative paper on communism in the museum, where he analyzes the narratives behind the exhibitions of Terror Háza and the Szoborpark in Budapest, the Zeitgeschichtliches Forum in Leipzig, the Grūtas Park in Lithuania, the Museum of Communism in Prague, the Museum in Kozłówka, as well as the temporary SocLand exhibition in the Palace of Culture in Warsaw.⁹² This temporary SocLand exhibition in Warsaw is the subject of Stanisławski's *Stalinism Made Chic*.⁹³ A literary description of the SocLand project was published by Konstantin Akinsha.⁹⁴ Monuments and exhibitions are most often created following local initiatives, either resulting from the availability of the objects (e.g., existing museum collections) or political initiatives of veteran associations and local authorities. Public debates are rare and social interest is scarce (one exception was the Palace of Culture in Warsaw). Scholarly analyses are also rare—perhaps due to methodological problems: a good study would require an interdisciplinary collaboration of art historians, historians, anthropologists, and sociologists.

Conclusions

1. Research and writing about the memory of communism started well before 1989: theoretical and sociological works on memory and historical consciousness have been published since the 1960s. Collections of interviews with communist leaders, as well as opposition activists, were published in the 1980s abroad (in Polish). Communism became an important subject of research after 1989 due to the opening of the archives, the end of censorship, public, political, and scholarly interest after years of imposed neglect and manipulation.

2. Research into the memory of communism in Poland was undertaken by scholars at universities and research institutes, but also by NGOs (e.g., the Karta Center, or Theatre NN), associations of the repressed, governmental institutions (the Institute of National Remembrance), mass media (*Gazeta Wyborcza* and

⁹¹ Czesław Bielecki, ed., *SocLand. Muzeum Komunizmu (w budowie)/Museum of Communism (under Construction)* (Warszawa: Oficyna Wydawnicza Volumen, 2003).

⁹² Arnold Bartetzky, "Visualizing the Experience of Dictatorship: Communism in the Museum," *Centropa* 6/3 (2006): 183–93.

⁹³ Wojciech Stanisławski, "Stalinism Made Chic," *Transitions Online*, 21 October 2003, <http://www.tol.org/client/article/10836-stalinism-made-chic.html>.

⁹⁴ Konstantin Akinsha, "Bringing Communism to the Museum," in *Leap into the City. Cultural Positions, Political Conditions. Seven scenes from Europe*, eds. Katrin Klingan and Ines Kappert (Cologne: Du Mont Literatur and Kust Verlag, 2006), 376–386.

Polityka), and individuals (amateur historians, e.g., Ziemkowski about June 1956 in Poznań). Mass media became an important agent in stimulating not only debates but also literary competitions and oral history projects.

3. While there are a lot of publications on communism, most only partly relate to the topic of remembering communism. Often the issue of remembering is interrelated with writing its history. Some works on the history of everyday life use published memoirs or interviews conducted by the authors. Yet few papers offer methodological reflections on using interviews and memoirs. A majority of authors write social or cultural histories of the communist period without oral history. Historians hardly ever resort to sociological studies of memory and sociological data. In spite of this, oral history is growing in Poland due to the work of individuals and several institutions and organizations, such as the Karta Center, or Theater NN. Hopefully, the growing number of oral history projects will lead to more frequent use of this methodology.

4. The topic of remembering communism is also linked to hermeneutical processes such as the assessment and judgment of the communist period. This study includes only academic works written by historians exemplifying the different approaches to the PRL history. The majority of the debates among journalists, historians, and politicians took place in dailies and weeklies during the last two decades. Such analysis is, however, outside the scope of this paper.

5. The topic of memory-in-the-making has produced very few analytical papers, with the majority of texts published in the press or museum brochures. Overall, there is a lot of ambiguity toward the communist period, reflected, for example, in the outcomes of political elections (e.g., leftist political parties were in power in certain periods). This situation explains the difficulties to construct a museum of the communist period and the relatively low interest in celebrations related to anticommunist events and persons.

6. The topic of remembering communism is investigated not only by historians but also by sociologists and anthropologists. As already mentioned, sociological works produce important insights. Better cooperation between different disciplines is challenging, and it would result in more interesting studies concerning the memory of communism in Poland.

7. The question of how communism is remembered in Poland cannot be easily answered. There are many contradictory memories of communism and this has produced heated debates. Historical and sociological research is independent of political pressure whereas memoirs are often published with a specific political agenda in mind. The individual and social memory of the Poles, partly reflected in memoirs and oral history projects, is yet to be analyzed.

6. Remembering Dictatorship: Eastern and Southern Europe Compared*

Stefan Troebst

Introduction

The French political scientist Maurice Duverger, born in 1917, became known throughout Europe in 1954 for Duverger's law, according to which a system of simple majority in single-representative districts tends to favor the development of a two-party system.¹ Ten years later, the social democrat published a book, entitled *De la Dictature*, in which, instead of writing pragmatically about election statistics, he adopted an emotional, even dramatic tone:

Dictatorship constantly threatens our generation: we are already used to it stalking us like a wild animal whose roars make us wake up at night, and sometimes comes so close that we feel its breath. Every part of our life is marked by tyranny. Mussolini entered the capitol while we were still playing with marbles; Hitler came while we were still in our youth; Franco and Petain appeared as we were young men; the people's democracies arose as we were making our way to maturity; then the military forces of the Middle East were next, finally ours.²

He is of course referring to the founding of the Fifth Republic with its dictatorial authorities for the president. Duverger portrays the "beast of dictatorship" as a European-wide phenomenon, as a predator that had by no means been finished in 1945, and which since then had created mischief that was in no way

* Abridged and updated translation of Stefan Troebst, *Diktaturerinnerung und Geschichtskultur im östlichen und südlichen Europa. Ein Vergleich der Vergleiche*, Working Paper Series, Global and European Studies Institute at the University of Leipzig, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2010). For a Polish version see: idem, "Pamięć o dyktaturach i kultura historyczna w Europie Wschodniej i Południowej. Zestawienie ujęć porównawczych," *Przegląd Historyczny* 102 (2011): 117–54.

¹ Maurice Duverger, *Political Parties: Their Organization and Activity in the Modern State* (London: Methuen, New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1954).

² Idem, *De la Dictature* (Paris: Julliard, 1961), 7.

limited to the Soviet hegemonic sphere. Alongside the transnational character of dictatorship as a form of government, he elucidates the generational shaping of the experience of dictatorship and its constant threat. Starting with Mussolini in 1922 and Hitler in 1933, Duverger's chronology goes through Franco in 1939 and Pétain in 1940, and uses De Gaulle in 1958 as a projection point.

From Duverger's 1961 perspective, the danger of dictatorship in Europe was endemic, ubiquitous, and permanent. Fifty years later, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, the take is somewhat different, but not when it comes to reflecting on the twentieth century (and especially after 1961): back then Portugal and Spain were dictatorships, as well as the Soviet Union, the other Warsaw Pact states, Josip Broz Tito's Yugoslavia and Enver Hoxha's Albania; in 1967 a military junta installed a dictatorial regime in Greece that lasted until 1974; Slobodan Milosevic ruled Serbia dictatorially from 1987 until 2000; the Eastern part of Moldova has been subject to the despotism of a late Soviet clique of functionaries, managers, and secret service agents since 1990; and in 1994 Alexander Lukashenko installed a continuing authoritarian and repressive presidential system in Belarus. Dictatorship in Europe is thus not a phenomenon of the past, much less its social impacts.

This study has a double aim: on the one hand, to provide an overview of theories, methods, modes of categorization, and regionalization of the comparison of dictatorships, and, in particular, of the comparison of postdictatorial modes of processing and remembrance, including relevant research literature and approaches, with focus on Southern and Eastern Europe. On the other hand, current European-wide developments in the dealing with dictatorships are analyzed. The political science comparison and research models of dictatorship and democratization patterns derived from Hannah Arendt, Juan J. Linz, and Alfred Stepan, as well as Wolfgang Merkel—all of whom argue astonishingly “historically”—serve both as frames of reference and critical discussion.

Comparison (of Remembrances) of Dictatorships

A comparative view of Europe illustrates that generations that have been shaped by traumatic collective experiences—consider Duverger's prototype—should in turn form the memory culture of national societies. In contemporary Western and Northern Europe, the memory of dictatorial regimes and/or occupation by a foreign power, is fading; only very few people living today have personally experienced Mussolini's Fascism, the Vichy regime, or the Nazi occupation of Norway. The case of Southern and Eastern Europe is different: about half of all Greeks, Portuguese, and Spanish have vivid memories of dictatorship which lasted until the mid-1970s. Higher still is the percentage of those who grew up in the state socialist societies of the Soviet Union and the other Warsaw Pact

states, as well as Albania and Yugoslavia. Herein lies the commonality that simultaneously connects the Southern part of “Western Europe” with “Eastern Europe” and distinguishes them from the Northern—more fortunate?—part of “Western Europe.” Along with the North–South barrier, which since 1945 has sorted the memory cultures of Europe into “West” and “East,” or even into Holocaust and Gulag memory, and which separates East-Central Europe from the CIS states across the Yalta–Stalingrad gap,³ there is at least one more line that divides the continent in memory culture, namely into an imaginary “center” and multiple “peripheries.” And just two of these “peripheries,” the Eastern and the Southern, have shared memories of dictatorial regimes that only collapsed two and a half to three and a half decades ago.

Carola Sachse and Edgar Wolfrum have recently established a detailed questionnaire catalogue for this field of study in the context of a research project about civil society and overcoming dictatorship in Europe:

Which memories are referred to by a group of people who find themselves within the old or new borders following the collapse of a previously shared—but differently experienced—dictatorship when the task is constructing a new national identity suitable for the new situation and authoritative in the future or for the creation of a new national self-image? Which stories are worth remembering and regarded as fundamental for the establishment of a nation and which ones can be abandoned? What meaning does the still fresh memory of the dictatorial past have; will it be kept alive or rather the opposite, excluded? In what way will one or the other occur and will the immediate experiences of individuals be considered? Which societal actors emerge in this construction: the state, the government, the civil society in its old or new organizational structures, intellectuals, parties, media, educational institutions? What roles do the “perpetrators” play, the large and small supporters of the old system of domination that mostly attempt to remain hidden? How do victims get a chance to express themselves? Who claims to be a victim using which reasoning and who is recognized as such by the surrounding society or stigmatized anew?⁴

³ Charles S. Maier, “Heisses und kaltes Gedächtnis. Zur politischen Halbwertszeit des faschistischen und kommunistischen Gedächtnisses,” *Transit. Europäische Revue* 22 (2001–2002): 153–65; Stefan Troebst, “Jalta versus Stalingrad, GULag versus Holocaust. Konfligierende Erinnerungskulturen im größeren Europa,” *Berliner Journal für Soziologie* 15, no. 3 (2005): 381–400; idem, “‘Kakoj takoj kovër’? Kul’tura pamjati v postkommunističeskich obščestvach Vostočnoj Evropy. Popytka obščego opisaniya i kategorizacii,” *Ab Imperio* 4, no. 4 (2004): 39–78; Ulrike Ackermann, “Das gesplittene Gedenken. Eine gesamteuropäische Erinnerungskultur ist noch nicht in Sicht,” *Internationale Politik* 61, no. 5 (2006): 44–48; Heinrich-August Winkler, “Erinnerungswelten im Widerstreit. Europas langer Weg zu einem gemeinsamen Bild vom Jahrhundert der Extreme,” in *Antisemitismus und Erinnerungskulturen im postkommunistischen Europa*, eds. Bernd Kauffmann and Basil Kerski (Osnabrück: fibre, 2006), 105–16.

⁴ Carola Sachse and Edgar Wolfrum, “Stürzende Denkmäler. Nationale Selbstbilder postdiktatorischer Gesellschaften in Europa–Einleitung,” in *Nationen und ihre Selbstbilder. Postdiktatorische Gesellschaften in Europa*, eds. idem and Regina Fritz (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008), 7–35, here 12.

Attempting to apply this extensive (but by no means comprehensive) catalogue to the “peripheral” dictatorships of Southern and Eastern Europe resembles an “exploration in a confusing terrain.”⁵ Though there are a large number of studies on the history of European dictatorships in the humanities and social sciences, some of them even with comparative aspirations, they focus mainly on the comparison between National Socialism and Stalinism, and respectively Soviet-style communism.⁶ And although the individual state socialist regimes of Soviet type are compared with each other, they are not compared with the dictatorships of Southern Europe—with a few notable exceptions that will be discussed later. Other monographs and collected volumes concentrate on national cases in Eastern or Southern Europe, occasionally even referring to both regions, but without explicit comparison⁷; with several exceptions, especially

⁵ Helmut König, “Statt einer Einleitung: Europas Gedächtnis. Sondierungen in einem unübersichtlichen Gelände,” in *Europas Gedächtnis. Das neue Europa zwischen nationalen Erinnerungen und gemeinsamer Identität*, eds. idem, Julia Schmidt, and Manfred Sicking (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008), 9–37. See also Helmut König, “Von der Diktatur zur Demokratie oder Was ist Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, eds. idem, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Wöll, special issue of *Leviathan* 18 (Wiesbaden: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1998), 371–92.

⁶ Cf. analyses by Peter Steinbach, “Zur Wahrnehmung von Diktaturen im 20. Jahrhundert,” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 51–52 (2002): 36–43; idem, “Diktaturen im 20. Jahrhundert—Kategorien, Vergleiche, Probleme,” *Der Bürger im Staat* 56, no. 3 (2006): 140–48 (also in *Lange Schatten. Bewältigung von Diktaturen*, eds. Angela Borgstedt, Siegfried Frech, and Michael Stolle [Schwalbach: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2007], 17–47); and Detlev Schmiechen-Ackermann, “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Diktaturvergleichs,” *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 2, no. 1 (2005): 15–38; as well as the concise overview by idem, *Diktaturen im Vergleich*, 2nd ed. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2006). Cf. also Anna Kaminsky, Dietmar Müller, and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939 in den Erinnerungskulturen der Europäer* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011); Michael Geyer and Sheila Fitzpatrick, eds., *Beyond Totalitarianism: Stalinism and Nazism Compared* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009); Jörg Baberowski and Anselm Doering-Manteuffel, *Ordnung durch Terror. Gewaltexzesse und Vernichtung im nationalsozialistischen und im stalinistischen Imperium* (Bonn: Dietz, 2006); Günther Heydemann and Heinrich Oberreuter, eds., *Diktaturen in Deutschland—Vergleichsaspekte. Strukturen, Institutionen und Verhaltensweisen* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2003); Dan Diner, “Gedächtnis und Erkenntnis. Nationalsozialismus und Stalinismus im Vergleich,” *Osteuropa* 50, no. 6 (2000): 698–708; Dietrich Beyrau, “Nationalsozialistisches Regime und Stalin-System. Ein riskanter Vergleich,” *Osteuropa* 50, no. 6 (2000): 709–20; Ian Kershaw and Moshe Lewin, eds., *Stalinism and Nazism: Dictatorships in Comparison* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Ludger Kühnhardt et al., eds., *Die doppelte deutsche Diktaturerfahrung. Drittes Reich und DDR—ein historisch-politikwissenschaftlicher Vergleich*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1996); and Paul Brooker, *Twentieth-Century Dictatorships: The Ideological One-Party States* (Houndmills/London: Macmillan, 1995).

⁷ See e.g., Natalie Sabanadze, *Globalization and Nationalism: The Cases of Georgia and the Basque Countries* (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2010); Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer, eds., *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the*

studies on Poland and Spain.⁸ Similarly wanting is the state of research regarding a European-wide or even global comparison of dictatorship *memories*,⁹ including strategies for processing and overcoming dictatorships,¹⁰ and postdictatorial memory cultures or phenomena of nostalgia. Even here, interest centers on National Socialism and Stalinism and memories thereof, alongside Italian Fascism,¹¹ and again most studies simply juxtapose national cases, rather than compare them on a transnational, regional, European, transcontinental, or global level.¹² It is remarkable that studies of East European memory culture have by

Twentieth Century (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2006); Gerhard Besier, together with Katarzyna Stokłosa, *Das Europa der Diktaturen. Eine neue Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2006).

⁸ Cf. the literature quoted below in notes 55 to 58.

⁹ *Diktaturerinnerungsvergleich* (or “comparison of dictatorship memories”), the neologism suggested in 2003 has not established itself, if one can believe the search engine Google (last search on 13 December 2011), and this despite its handiness. Cf. Stefan Troebst, “Diktaturerinnerungsvergleich. Eine Einführung,” in *Diktaturbewältigung, Erinnerungspolitik und Geschichtskultur in Polen und Spanien*, ed. idem, special issue of *Jahrbuch für europäische Geschichte* 4 (München: Oldenbourg, 2003), 1–10; and idem, “Diktaturerinnerungsvergleich,” in *Diktaturbewältigung und nationale Selbstvergewisserung. Geschichtskulturen in Polen und Spanien im Vergleich*, eds. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and idem (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 27–35. See, however, for a comparison of cultures of remembrance in Poland and Ukraine, Oxana Shevel, “The Politics of Memory in a Divided Society: A Comparison of Post-Franco Spain and Post-Soviet Ukraine,” *Slavic Review* 70, no. 1 (2011): 137–64.

¹⁰ Innovative due to their trans-European comparative approach are Andrea Fleschenberg, *Vergangenheitsaufklärung durch Aktenöffnung in Deutschland und Portugal* (Münster: LIT, 2004); and Marianne Kneuer, *Demokratisierung durch die EU. Süd- und Osteuropa im Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2007). For trans-Atlantic comparisons, see Daniel Kerscher, *Demokratisierung in Südosteuropa und den Andenländern. Die Fragilität des Verfassungs- und Rechtsstaates in Albanien, Bulgarien, Ecuador, Peru, Rumänien und Venezuela* (Hamburg: Wissenschaftsverlag Dr. Kovač, 2009); and Katherine Hite and Cesarini Paola, eds., *Authoritarian Legacies and Democracy in Latin America and Southern Europe* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2008).

¹¹ See the profound introductions by Christoph Cornelissen, Lutz Klinkhammer, and Wolfgang Schwentker, “Nationale Erinnerungskulturen seit 1945 im Vergleich,” in *Erinnerungskulturen. Deutschland, Italien und Japan seit 1945*, eds. idem (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2003), 9–27; and Harald Welzer and Claudia Lenz, “Opa in Europa. Erste Befunde einer vergleichenden Tradierungsforschung,” in *Der Krieg der Erinnerung. Holocaust, Kollaboration und Widerstand im europäischen Gedächtnis*, ed. idem (Frankfurt a. M.: S. Fischer, 2007), 7–40. Cf. also Christoph Cornelissen, “Zur Erforschung von Erinnerungskulturen in West- und Osteuropa. Methoden und Fragestellungen,” in *Diktatur—Krieg—Vertreibung. Erinnerungskulturen in Tschechien, der Slowakei und Deutschland seit 1945*, eds. idem, Roman Holec, and Jiří Pešek (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 25–44; as well as Andreas Langenohl, “Memory in Post-Authoritarian Societies,” in *Cultural Memory Studies: An International and Interdisciplinary Handbook*, eds. Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2008), 163–72.

¹² See the relevant volumes by Katrin Hammerstein et al., eds., *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangen-*

now become much more advanced than those of other parts of the continent.¹³

- heit (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009); Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stoklosa, eds., *Geschichtsbilder in den postdiktatorischen Ländern Europas. Auf der Suche nach historisch-politischen Identitäten* (Berlin: LIT, 2009); Thomas Grossbölting and Dirk Hofmann, eds., *Vergangenheit in der Gegenwart. Vom Umgang mit Diktaturerfahrungen in Ost- und Westeuropa* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2008); Fritz, Sachse, and Wolfrum, *Nationen und ihre Selbstbilder*; Bernd Faulenbach and Franz-Josef Jelich, eds., *'Transformationen' der Erinnerungskulturen in Europa nach 1989* (Essen: Klartext, 2006); Borejsza and Ziemer, eds., *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes*, here especially pt. 4; Richard Ned Lebow, Wulf Kansteiner, and Claudio Fogu, eds., *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006); Alfons Kenkmann and Hasko Zimmer, eds., *Nach Kriegen und Diktaturen. Umgang mit Vergangenheit als internationales Problem—Bilanzen und Perspektiven für das 21. Jahrhundert* (Essen: Klartext, 2005); Henri Rouso, ed., *Stalinisme et nazisme: Histoire et mémoire comparées* (Bruxelles: Editions Complexe, 1999); Claudia Lenz, Jens Schmidt, and Oliver von Wrochem, eds., *Erinnerungskulturen im Dialog. Europäische Perspektiven auf die NS-Vergangenheit* (Hamburg/Münster: UNRAST-Verlag, 2002); Volkhard Knigge and Norbert Frei, eds., *Verbrechen erinnern. Die Auseinandersetzung mit Holocaust und Völkermord* (München: C. H. Beck, 2002); Jan-Werner Müller, ed., *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); and Petra Bock and Edgar Wolfrum, eds., *Umkämpfte Vergangenheit. Geschichtsbilder, Erinnerung und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). On Holocaust memories, see Jens Kroh, *Transnationale Erinnerung. Der Holocaust im Fokus geschichtspolitischer Initiativen* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 2008); Klas-Göran Karlsson and Ulf Zander, eds., *Echoes of the Holocaust: Historical Cultures in Contemporary Europe* (Lund: Nordic Academic Press, 2003); and Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2006); as well as Kristina Kaiserová and Gert Röhrborn, eds., *Present Tensions: European Writers on Overcoming Dictatorships* (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2008); and Jutta Vinzent, *Overcoming Dictatorships: Contemporary East and West European Visual Inquiries. Ausstellungskatalog* (Bielefeld/Leipzig: Kerber Verlag, 2008). Neither South nor East European comparative cases are to be found in the volume by Joachim Landkammer, Thomas Noetzel, and Walter Ch. Zimmerli, eds., *Erinnerungsmanagement: Systemtransformation und Vergangenheitspolitik im internationalen Vergleich* (München: Fink, 2006).
- ¹³ Manfred Sapper and Volker Weichsel, eds., *Geschichtspolitik und Gegenerinnerung. Krieg, Gewalt und Trauma im Osten Europas*, special issue of *Osteuropa* 58, no. 6 (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2008); Marko Lehti and Jörg Hackmann, eds., *Contested and Shared Places of Memory: History and Politics in North Eastern Europe*, special issue of *Journal of Baltic Studies* 39, no. 4 (London: Routledge, 2008); Dietmar Müller, "Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik im östlichen Europa," in *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Festschrift für Hannes Siegrist zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 317–34; Helmut Altrichter, ed., *GegenErinnerung. Geschichte als politisches Argument im Transformationsprozeß Ost-, Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa* (München: Oldenbourg, 2006); Volkhard Knigge and Ulrich Mähler, eds., *Der Kommunismus im Museum. Formen der Auseinandersetzung in Deutschland und Ostmitteleuropa* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2005); Stefan Troebst, *Postkommunistische Erinnerungskulturen im östlichen Europa. Bestandsaufnahme, Kategorisierung, Periodisierung/Postkomunistyczne kultury pamięci w Europie Wschodniej. Stan, kategoryzacja, periodyzacja* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2005); Andrei Corbea-Hoisie, Rudolf Jaworski, and

Regarding the comparison, or more precisely the juxtaposition, National Socialism clearly dominates as object of comparison, while South European cases are only considered as an exception.¹⁴ Furthermore, the term “memory” is occasionally used only as a synonym for the political or juridical dealing with the past, as is the case in Mark Arenhövel’s truly European-wide comparative study on democracy and remembrance of dictatorship.¹⁵

Practically no broad, or even comparative studies exist on the memory cultures of Portugal, Greece, and Spain (except with Poland), a fact that generally applies to Western Europe as well.¹⁶ Beyond that, these three examples have only occasionally been subjects of intraregional South European comparisons of dictatorships.¹⁷ A trans-European perspective is characteristic for Tony Judt’s

Monika Sommer, eds., *Umbruch im östlichen Europa. Die nationale Wende und das kollektive Gedächtnis* (Innsbruck: Studienverlag, 2004); Maria Todorova, ed., *Balkan Identities: Nation and Memory* (London: Hurst, 2004); idem, ed., *Remembering Communism: Genres of Representation* (New York: Social Science Research Council, 2009); and idem and Zsuzsa Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2010). On the museum aspect, cf. Arnold Bartetzky, “Visualisierung der Diktaturerfahrung. Der Kommunismus im Museum,” in *Neue Staaten—neue Bilder? Visuelle Kultur im Dienst staatlicher Selbstdarstellung in Zentral- und Osteuropa seit 1918*, eds. idem, Marina Dmitrieva and Stefan Troebst (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2005), 221–32; as well as Izabella Main, “How Is Communism Displayed? Exhibitions and Museums of Communist Poland,” in *Past for the Eyes: East European Representations of Communism in Cinema and Museums after 1989*, eds. Oksana Sarkisova and Péter Apor (Budapest/New York: CEU Press, 2008), 371–400; and Nikolai Vukov, “The ‘Unmemorable’ and the ‘Unforgettable’: ‘Muzeumizing’ the Socialist Past in Post-1989 Bulgaria,” *ibid.*, 307–34.

¹⁴ Regarding two such exceptions, see Ulf Brunnbauer and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Zwischen Amnesie und Nostalgie. Die Erinnerung an den Kommunismus in Südosteuropa* (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2007) (includes the memory of Greek Communism); and Bernd Henningsen, Hendriette Kliemann-Geisinger, and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte. Nord- und südeuropäische Perspektiven* (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009) (includes the Levant).

¹⁵ Mark Arenhövel, *Demokratie und Erinnerung. Der Blick zurück auf Diktatur und Menschenrechtsverbrechen* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 2000).

¹⁶ Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

¹⁷ Nikiforos P. Diamandouros, Hans-Jürgen Puhle, and Richard Gunter, eds., *The Politics of Democratic Consolidation: Southern Europe in Comparative Perspective* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995); Ronald H. Chilcote, *Transitions from Dictatorship to Democracy: Comparative Studies of Spain, Portugal and Greece* (Basingstoke: Taylor and Francis, 1990); Guillermo O’Donnell, Philippe C. Schmitter, and Laurence Whitehead, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 1: Southern Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and Allan Williams, *Southern Europe Transformed: Political and Economic Change in Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain* (London: Harper and Row, 1984); and Beate Kohler, *Politischer Umbruch in Südeuropa. Portugal, Griechenland, Spanien auf dem Weg zur Demokratie* (Bonn: Europa-Union Verlag, 1981). For a neo-Marxist postcolonial per-

approach to Stalinism and its remembrance, or respective nonremembrance. However, even his account focuses on France and Italy, whose intellectuals, according to Judt, extensively Stalinized themselves.¹⁸ This mesoregional comparison is also characteristic for the research field of transnational justice in postdictatorial Europe that has recently gathered momentum and that also includes non-European case studies.¹⁹ To be fair, it should be underlined that comparisons of the East and the South are *generally* unusual. A rare exception is David D. Laitin's research on postdictatorial nationalisms and regionalisms, including their potential violence for which Spain, the Ukraine and Georgia serve as examples.²⁰ In the research field of the development of interethnic rela-

spective, see Nicos Poulantzas, *Die Krise der Diktaturen. Portugal, Griechenland, Spanien* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1975).

¹⁸ Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (New York: Penguin, 2005), here especially chapter 7, "Culture Wars," 197–225. See also idem, "The Past Is Another Country: Myth and Memory in Postwar Europe," *Daedalus* 21, no. 4 (1992): 83–118.

¹⁹ See Angelika Nussberger and Caroline von Gall, eds., *Bewusstes Erinnern und bewusstes Vergessen. Der juristische Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in den Ländern Mittel- und Osteuropas* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2011); Julie Trappe, "Verjährung, Rückwirkungsverbot und Menschenrechtsschutz—Standards strafrechtlicher Vergangenheitsaufarbeitung in Europa," in *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 123–34; Julie Trappe, *Rumäniens Umgang mit der kommunistischen Vergangenheit. Eine Untersuchung aus strafrechtlicher Perspektive* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009); Lavinia Stan, ed., *Transitional Justice in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union: Reckoning with the Communist Past* (London: Routledge, 2008); Fleschenberg, *Vergangenheitsaufklärung durch Aktenöffnung*; Jörg Arnold, "Criminal Law as Reaction to System Crime: Policy for Dealing with the Past in European Transitions," in *Totalitarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century*, eds. Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 399–430; Jon Elster, *Die Akten schließen. Nach dem Ende von Diktaturen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 2005); István Rév, *Retroactive Justice: Prehistory of Post-Communism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2005); Alexandra Barahona De Brito, Paloma Aguilar Fernández, and Carmen Gonzáles-Enriquez, eds., *The Politics of Memory: Transitional Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); and Neil J. Kritz, ed., *Transitional Justice: How Emerging Democracies Reckon with Former Regimes*, 2 vols. (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1995). Fundamental regarding Eastern Europe: Timothy Garton Ash, "Mesomnesie," *Transit. Europäische Revue* 22 (2001–2002): 32–48; and idem, "Trials, Purges, and History Lessons: Treating a Difficult Past in Post-Communist Europe," in *Memory and Power in Post-War Europe: Studies in the Presence of the Past*, ed. Jan-Werner Müller (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 265–82.

²⁰ David D. Laitin, "Nationalist Revivals and Violence," *Archives européennes de sociologie* 36, no. 1 (1995): 3–43. Cf. also two volumes comparing Western and Eastern Europe by Farimah Daftary and Stefan Troebst, eds., *Radical Ethnic Movements in Contemporary Europe* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2003); and Philipp Ther and Holm Sundhaussen, eds., *Nationalitätenkonflikte im 20. Jahrhundert. Ursachen von inter-ethnischer Gewalt im Vergleich* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2001); as well as the trans-Atlantic comparison by Peter Waldmann,

tions and ethno-political conflicts in dictatorial, postdictatorial, and nondictatorial regimes, the majority of studies use the post-Soviet area as a referential and comparative frame—Northern Ireland, the Basque country, “Padania,” or Corsica remain unexamined.²¹

“Nontotalitarian Military Dictatorships”: Hannah Arendt’s Implicit East–South Comparison

One of the major exceptions in comparing East to South European dictatorships is Hannah Arendt, whose book, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, was published in 1951 and is still discussed today. Arendt refers to Romania, Poland, the Baltic states, Hungary, Portugal, and Franco’s Spain of the interwar period, for which she coined the term, “nontotalitarian military dictatorship”—in contrast to contemporary “totalitarian dictatorships,” such as the Soviet regime under Stalin and the National Socialist regime under Hitler.²² At the same time, she pointed out that the creation of all those “nontotalitarian military dictatorships” was the result of “totalitarian movements.”²³ The fact that these movements failed to establish a “totalitarian dictatorship” she attributed to the modest size of the states in question. According to Arendt, those movements “simply could not afford to install an actual total dominance because they did not have enough human material to cope with the enormous losses constantly demanded by a totalitarian apparatus of power.”²⁴ The lack of such a “totalitarian movement” in the cases of royal dictatorships in interwar Albania, Yugoslavia, and Bulgaria, as well as the Metaxas dictatorship in Greece from 1936 to 1941 is presumably the reason why Arendt left them out of her list.²⁵ While the “nontotalitarian

Ethnischer Radikalismus. Ursachen und Folgen gewaltsamer Minderheitenkonflikte am Beispiel des Baskenlandes, Nordirlands und Quebecs (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1989).

²¹ As examples, see David D. Laitin, *Identity in Formation: The Russian-Speaking Populations in the Near Abroad* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); as well as Pål Kolstø, ed., *Nation-Building and Ethnic Integration in Post-Soviet Societies: An Investigation of Latvia and Kazakhstan* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1999); and idem, ed., *National Integration and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Societies: The Cases of Estonia and Moldova* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2002).

²² Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1951), 303. For the current state of research, cf. Uwe Backes, “Totalitarismus und Transformation. Eine Einführung,” in *Totalitarismus und Transformation. Defizite der Demokratiekonsolidierung in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, eds. idem, Tytus Jaskułowski, and Abel Polese (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 13–26.

²³ Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 304.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Cf. regarding this type of dictatorship: Holm Sundhaussen, “Die Königsdiktaturen in Südosteuropa. Umrisse einer Synthese,” in *Autoritäre Regime in Ostmittel- und Südosteuropa 1919–*

dictatorships” of East-Central and Southeastern Europe fell to Hitler’s expansionism and later—with the exception of Greece—Stalin, the Second World War brought no such end to the dictatorial regimes in Spain and Portugal. But Arendt’s argument for a resource-dependent reduction of totalitarian potential also applies, in modified form, to the postwar period. This is proven by the case of Yugoslavia. Communist Yugoslavia in fact rejected Soviet claims to hegemony in 1948, but because of dramatic financial problems was forced to partially open to the West in the early 1950s. This is the only explanation why the initially absolute totalitarian claim of Titoism was later attenuated to workers’ self-management, nonalignment, family-based private economy, and eventually, controlled freedom of the media.²⁶ Only the development of Albania during the Cold War does not fit with Arendt’s explanatory model: small and poor, and oscillating between Belgrade, Moscow, and Beijing, the national communist Enver Hoxha established a veritable totalitarian Stalinist–Maoist type dictatorship in miniature.²⁷ Arendt also failed to analyze the exceptional case of Czechoslovakia, whose democratic tradition of the interwar period was temporarily reinstalled in 1945 and only in 1948 disrupted by the communists’ semi-legal coming to power.²⁸

While the military components highlighted by Arendt for the interwar period were present, though not dominant, in the party dictatorships of East-Central and Southeastern Europe—with the exception of Poland under General Wojciech Jaruzelski from 1981 to 1989—they clearly decreased in Spain during the post-Civil War era. They remained in power in Portugal and in Greece during the nondictatorial “nominally democratic” hiatus between the end of the Metaxas dictatorship in 1941, respectively the occupation by the armies of Nazi Germany, Italy, and Bulgaria until 1944, and the establishment of the Junta regime in 1967.²⁹

1944, ed. Erwin Oberländer (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2001), 337–48; and Michael Schmidt-Neke, *Entstehung und Ausbau der Königsdiktatur in Albanien (1912–1939). Regierungsbildungen, Herrschaftsweise und Machteliten in einem jungen Balkanstaat* (München: Oldenbourg, 1987).

²⁶ Sabrina Ramet, *The Three Yugoslavias: State-Building and Legitimation, 1918–2003* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 2006); idem, *Thinking about Yugoslavia: Scholarly Debates about the Yugoslav Breakup and the Wars in Bosnia and Kosovo* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁷ James O’Donnell, *A Coming of Age: Albania under Enver Hoxha* (Boulder, CO: East European Monographs, 1999).

²⁸ Karel Kaplan, *The Short March: The Communist Takeover in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1948* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1987); Martin R. Myant, *Socialism and Democracy in Czechoslovakia, 1945–1948* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

²⁹ See the fundamental study encompassing the entire time span from the beginning of the Metaxa dictatorship in 1936 to the end of the Junta regime in 1974 under the rubric of “authoritarian rule,” Hagen Fleischer, “Authoritarian Rule in Greece (1936–1974) and Its Heritage,” in *Totali-*

Overall, Hannah Arendt's concept of "nontotalitarian military dictatorship" proves problematic, considering the East-Central and Southeast European cases named in her book. Even though the heads of state and government of Estonia, Greece, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania of the interwar period were occasionally active or former military officials, their regimes cannot generally be considered military dictatorships in the classical sense. And despite all its martial components, even Spain under the Franco regime can hardly be classified as a military dictatorship. Thus, Arendt's concept should be widened up toward a "nontotalitarian dictatorship," and accordingly, the distinction from "authoritarian regime" is blurred.

"Modern Nondemocratic Regime": Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan's Explicit East–South Comparison of Dictatorships and Transition Processes

The second major exception of East–South comparison of dictatorships (including attempts for a comparison of memories of dictatorship) is the 1996 book *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America and Post-Communist Europe* by Linz and Stepan. The authors adapted and further developed Arendt's concept of "nontotalitarian military dictatorship" (including its tendencies of extension toward authoritarian regime) in the form of "modern nondemocratic regimes."³⁰ Motivated by the epic events of 1989 in the eastern half of Europe, the two political scientists undertook a transregional and transcontinental comparison, researching the process of transformation of a "modern nondemocratic regime" into a "consolidated democracy."³¹ In addition to South American examples, their case studies include the South European states of Spain, Portugal, and Greece, as well as the East European states of Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, the Russian Federation, Estonia, and Latvia.

Linz and Stepan's key working hypothesis is that "democracies need five interacting arenas to become consolidated: ... a lively society, a relatively autonomous political society, a rule of law, a usable state, and an economic

tarian and Authoritarian Regimes in Europe: Legacies and Lessons from the Twentieth Century, eds. Jerzy W. Borejsza and Klaus Ziemer (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2006), 237–75. See also Wolfgang Merkel, *Systemtransformation. Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung* (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 1999), 246.

³⁰ Juan J. Linz and Alfred Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation: Southern Europe, South America, and Post-Communist Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 38–54. Regarding the appropriation of the concept, cf. Paul Brooker, *Non-Democratic Regimes: Theory, Government, and Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2001).

³¹ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, xiv.

society.”³² Their research design includes “seven generic variables” among “two macro variables,” namely “the complex relationship between state, nation(s), and democratization” (or rather “statehood”), as well as “the character of the prior regime.”³³ The latter variable leaves a cultural back door called “history” or “legacy”:

For better or worse we will not restrict ourselves to the procrustean bed of this framework [i.e., the five interacting arenas and seven generic variables—S. T.]. The specificities of history are also important, and thus we will discuss the contributions, where appropriate, of some variables..., that do not lend themselves to generic propositions but are critical to the historical analysis of any particular case.³⁴

Accordingly, a new reading of the Linz and Stepan book is fruitful if one places the authors’ application of the concept of “legacy of dictatorship” at the center of attention. Because in a functional perspective this term is largely congruent with cultural studies categories such as memory or remembrance, e.g., when the authors discuss “legacies of communist-style totalitarianism,”³⁵ “the difficult legacy [of] totalitarianism cum sultanism and nationalism,”³⁶ “legacies for democratic transition and consolidation” due to the disintegration of the USSR,³⁷ or “the Baltics’ difficult legacy.”³⁸ Whenever the contents of the social science toolbox prove insufficient, it seems that the two authors grab the combination wrench of “legacy”—a methodological analogy of those whose “psychological nature” was a “weak” factor in Stalin’s otherwise “hard” definition of a nation.³⁹ How historically Linz and Stepan argue in the process becomes clear with a glance at their use of the concept of legacy in the historiography of Eastern Europe. Maria Todorova in particular opts to include mesoregionally structural characteristics of the *longue durée*-type as “historical legacies,”⁴⁰ a

³² Ibid.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Ibid., 244.

³⁶ Ibid., 362.

³⁷ Ibid., 386.

³⁸ Ibid., 402.

³⁹ “A nation is a historically constituted, stable community of language, territory, economic life, and psychological make-up manifested in a community culture” (Joseph Stalin, “Marxism and the National Question,” in *Marxism and the National and Colonial Question: A Collection of Articles and Speeches*, ed. A. Fineberg [London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1934], 8).

⁴⁰ Maria Todorova, “Historische Vermächtnisse als Analysekatgorie. Der Fall Südosteuropa,” in *Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf*, eds. Karl Kaser, Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl, and Robert Richler (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2003), 227–52. Cf. also idem, “Spacing Europe: What Is a Historical Region?,” *East Central Europe* 32, no. 1–2 (2005): 59–78; and idem, “The Ottoman Legacy in the Balkans,” in *Imperial Legacy: The Ottoman Imprint in the Balkans and the Middle East*, ed. L. Carl Brown (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 45–77.

concept that can be applied to all of Europe and beyond.⁴¹ And the once again historically based idea of historical path-dependency is an epistemological guideline for international social science research on Eastern Europe.⁴²

Linz and Stepan's historicizing approach becomes most obvious in the chapter on Estonia and Latvia, where they suggest not merely a regionally specific, but a globally valid causal link between ethnic homogeneity and chances for democratization. According to them, the degree to which ethnic groups that do not belong to the titular nation are present in the territory of the state determines the stability of every democratic national state. Just as a state could not exist without a numerically strong titular nation, democracy too is inconceivable without such a titular nation.⁴³ However, the authors identify a contradiction between the principle of democracy and the dynamics of such nationalisms that have on the one hand been subjected to the hegemony of a foreign imperial power for a long time, and on the other hand, after attaining sovereignty, became part of the Brubakerian triad of nation-state, national minority, and a neighbor state that protects the national minority,⁴⁴ in this case the near super-power Russian Federation. In such cases, history and legacy play a decisive role:

⁴¹ In addition, in this context reference should be made to the exceptionally strict economist and Nobel laureate Joseph E. Stiglitz, who in a critical study of the success and failure of the "Western" concept of shock therapy for the postcommunist economies inserted an emergency exit of a "difference in history," which is possibly responsible for the transformational success: Sergio Godoy and Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Growth, Initial Conditions, Law and Speed of Privatization in Transition Countries: 11 Years After*, National Bureau of Economic Research, Working Paper 11992 (Cambridge: National Bureau of Economic Research, 2006), 3, <http://www.nber.org/papers/w11992>. Cf. in a similar vein, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, "Märchenstunden. Erste Lieferung: Rätselhafte Wirtschaftswissenschaften," *Der Spiegel*, 1 October 2011, 150–52.

⁴² Carsten Goehrke, "Transformationschancen und historisches Erbe. Versuch einer vergleichenden Erklärung auf dem Hintergrund europäischer Geschichtslandschaften," in *Transformation und historisches Erbe in den Staaten des europäischen Ostens*, eds. idem and Seraina Gilly (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 2000), 653–741; Holm Sundhaussen, "Die Ursprünge der osteuropäischen Produktionsweise in der Frühen Neuzeit," in *Die Frühe Neuzeit in der Geschichtswissenschaft. Forschungstendenzen und Forschungsergebnisse*, ed. Nada Bošk-ovska-Leimgruber (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1997), 145–62; Holm Sundhaussen, "Der Wandel in der osteuropäischen Agrarverfassung während der frühen Neuzeit: Ein Beitrag zur Divergenz der Entwicklungswege von Ost- und Westeuropa," *Südost-Forschungen* 49 (1990): 15–56; and Daniel Chirot, ed., *The Origins of Backwardness in Eastern Europe: Economics and Politics from the Middle Ages until the Early Twentieth Century* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989).

⁴³ Cf. the illustration "The Inter-relationship between State, Nation(s), and Democratization," in Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 36.

⁴⁴ Rogers Brubaker, "National Minorities, Nationalizing States, and External National Homelands in the New Europe," in *Nationalism Reframed: Nationhood and the National Question in the New Europe*, ed. idem (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 55–76.

History and the specific legacy of the previous non-democratic regimes are important for all analyses of democratization. There is possibly no area where history is more important than in the Baltics, where the previous non-democratic regime, the USSR, brutally transformed these polities demographically, culturally, economically, and even ecologically.⁴⁵

This refers to the authoritarian sovereign experience during the interwar period, the Soviet incorporation in 1940, the German occupation from 1941 to 1944, as well as to the subsequent forced integration into the USSR between 1944 and 1991, including all severe ethnic, social, demographic, cultural, economic, and further changes.⁴⁶ Thus, according to Linz and Stepan, the negative legacy of the prior dictatorial regime, in this case Soviet rule, significantly pre-determines the path of transition toward democracy and its consolidation. In the Estonian and Latvian case, as Linz and Stepan see it, the interethnic tensions and conflicts from 1991 to 1995 were inevitable. Regarding the alternative of “multicultural democracy and irredentism” at the beginning of the 1990s, the two scholars were carefully optimistic about the further development of Estonia, but pessimistic about Latvia.⁴⁷

Nevertheless, the authors warn against causally linking negative dictatorial memory and successful transition to democracy. In the multipage “Excursus on Why Negative Evaluation of the Past Non-Democratic Regime Is Not a Requirement for Democratic Consolidation,” they reject the argument that consolidation of democracy is directly related to critically processing the dictatorial past for conceptual, historical, and empirical reasons.⁴⁸ Since this point represents an extraordinarily severe clash of a cultural–moral imperative for catharsis and scholarly pragmatism, here is the three-part argument in its entire length:

Conceptually, we reject such arguments because our definition of consolidation is present and future oriented. Thus, a key indicator for us is whether or not a strong majority of the citizens is in agreement with such phrases as “for a country like ours democracy is better than any other alternative.” Analytically, a positive attitude toward democracy as the best alternative for now, and the future does *not* require a negative attitude toward the past. People can make an independent evaluation and affirm that the preceding regime had achievements or at least was not all bad and still support democracy as their preferred form of government.

Historically, we reject such arguments because in our judgment the overwhelming majority of consolidated democracies did not actually begin their transition to democracy with a majority of members of the polity or even many of the key agents of the transition being either convinced democrats or citizens who rejected everything about the past regime. Rather, a democratic majority emerges when elites and ordinary citizens alike begin to evaluate, for the societal problems they *then* face and the overall world within which they then live, that democratic procedures of conflict regulation are better or less dangerous than any other form of

⁴⁵ Linz and Stepan, *Problems of Democratic Transition and Consolidation*, 402.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 403–6.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 432–33.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 143–47, here 143.

governance. Thus, for many key elites democratic *behavior* emerges before democratic *attitudes* because elites may make the calculation that breaking the democratic rules of the game—whether they like it or not—will not yield a positive outcome for their interest. Democracy becomes the “only game in town” partly by belief and partly by elite calculation of the cost of compliance versus the cost of mobilization for other governing alternatives.

Empirically, we reject such arguments because for recent transitions we have conclusive documentation showing that it is possible for democracy to become consolidated while only a minority of the public completely rejects the past. Proof of this is that, in 1985 in Portugal and Spain, when according to our criteria democracy had already been consolidated in both countries, less than 30 percent of those polled said that the Franco or Salazar regimes were “only bad,” but a strong majority said that “democracy is preferable to any other regime.” [Emphasis in original —S. T.]⁴⁹

At the same time, the authors postulate that their empirically proven findings for Southern Europe (and South America) are equally valid with regard to the postcommunist societies in East-Central and Southeastern Europe:

Overwhelmingly, respondents in Central Europe (but not in the former Soviet Union) five years after the collapse of Communism simultaneously said that the economy was better under the Communist regime but that the political system was better under the new democratic regime. Thus, they were able to differentiate between an “economic basket of goods” and a “political basket of goods,” between a past that for them as individuals was not all bad and a different political future they aspired to even though they knew they would lose elements of the past they valued.⁵⁰

Linz and Stepan only marginally mention a fact that plays a decisive role in the retrospective judgment of the dictatorial regimes, namely the delegitimization of South European dictatorships through lost wars.⁵¹ This was the case with the Portuguese colonial war in Angola and the Greek military intervention in Cyprus, although not with Spain.⁵² Yet, a similar effect could be observed regarding the high losses of the Soviet armed forces in the war in Afghanistan, particularly among soldiers from non-Russian union republics in the European, trans-Caucasian and Central Asian parts of the country, as well as with regard to the role that the withdrawal of the troops from Kabul and the Hindu Kush played for the USSR as a whole. Nevertheless, the Russian, Armenian, Kazakh,

⁴⁹ Ibid., 143–44.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 147.

⁵¹ Ibid., 87–88.

⁵² Cf. Manuel Löff, “Coming to Terms with the Dictatorial Past in Portugal after 1974: Silence, Remembrance and Ambiguity,” in *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen im Süden und Osten Europas. Bestandsaufnahme und Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 55–121; Adamantios Skordos, “Die Diktatur der Jahre 1967 bis 1974 in der griechischen und internationalen Historiographie,” in *ibid.*, 122–204; and Xosé-Manoel Núñez and Andreas Stucki, “Neueste Entwicklungen und Tendenzen der postdiktatorischen Geschichtskultur in Spanien,” in *ibid.*, 205–23.

or Belorussian opinion about the Soviet Union is clearly more positive than the Poles' judgment of the People's Republic of Poland or the Slovaks' about Czechoslovakia.

A subject completely ignored by Linz and Stepan is the grave difference between the South European dictatorships and the USSR on the one hand, and those in East-Central and Southeastern Europe, on the other, which can be viewed in terms of autochthony and allochthony. More precisely, the dictatorial regimes in Spain, Portugal, Greece, and the Soviet Union were genuine Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, and Russian products, hence quasi-autochthones, whereas the dictatorships in Poland, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria (with the aforementioned exception of Czechoslovakia) were ideological exports of the USSR, mediated by means of national communist movements or the Red Army. In the cases of Georgia, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, the political heteronomy exercised by Moscow, even coincided with an annexation (which was disguised as a voluntary fusion). In this context, the Polish discussion of the early 1990s about whether the Communist People's Republic of Poland, founded in 1944, should be classified as a sovereign state or only a Soviet colony, is enlightening. They concluded that the People's Republic of Poland was by no means a Soviet-occupied country, but of genuine Polish communist founding. Nevertheless, the People's Republic of Poland was not counted among the three Polish republics: 1569–1795, 1918–1939, and from 1989 forward.⁵³

Linz and Stepan also fail to discuss another structural difference between their case studies in Southern and Eastern Europe: namely the fact that the Spanish, Portuguese, and Greek dictatorships maintained a system of market economy, which gave them crucial advantages in their transition to democracy over regimes in Eastern, East-Central, and Southeastern Europe. The Wrocław-based sociologist Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska researched this aspect in a comparative study on associated strategies of political elites in Spain and Poland during the transformation period.⁵⁴ Historian Hanna Buchner-Naimska of

⁵³ Andrzej Friszke, "War die Volksrepublik Polen ein besetztes Land? Ein 'Historikerstreit,'" *Forum für osteuropäische Ideen- und Zeitgeschichte* 2, no. 1 (1998): 231–50; and Rafał Stobiecki, "Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit. Kommunismus und Volksrepublik in der öffentlichen Debatte Polens nach 1989," in *Diktatur—Krieg—Vertreibung. Erinnerungskulturen in Tschechien, der Slowakei und Deutschland seit 1945*, eds. Christoph Cornelissen, Roman Holec, and Jiří Pešek (Essen: Klartext, 2005), 429–51.

⁵⁴ Bogusława Dobek-Ostrowska, *Hiszpania i Polska: Elity polityczne w okresie przejścia do demokracji. Analiza porównawcza* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 1996). See also two comparative long-term economic historical studies: Jordi Catalan, *The Development of Two European Peripheral Economies in the Long Term: Poland and Spain 1450–1990* (Mannheim: Mannheimer Zentrum für Europäische Sozialforschung, 1995); and Jonas Scherner, *Eliten und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung. Kongresspolen und Spanien im 19. Jahrhundert* (Münster: LIT, 2001). Regarding the role model function of Spain for the society and nation of Poland in the nineteenth and twentieth century, cf. Jan Kieniewicz, *Hiszpania w zwier-*

Warsaw exemplified this in her comparative case study of a Spanish small town and a Polish small town in “year one” after the end of dictatorship.⁵⁵

Furthermore, analyzing the example of the NATO entries for Spain in 1982 and Poland in 1999, political scientist Beata Wojna of Warsaw identified another momentous difference, namely the postdictatorial changes in foreign and security policies. While democratized Spain could maintain its anti-Soviet course set by Franco in the interwar period, rebranding it “Western orientation” after 1976 in the context of the ongoing Cold War—a process with Portuguese and Greek parallels—Poland and the majority of East-Central and Southeast European countries had to perform a 180 degree turn of their foreign policy and alliances from “East” to “West,” something that was not easy to explain to their domestic populations.⁵⁶ Obviously, the friction resulting from this development slowed the pace of reform.

Finally, historian Claudia Kraft elaborated that the strategies, (European) concepts of the future, and symbolic representations of the transition were vastly different in the Spanish and Polish cases. Hereby, she is able to demonstrate that Tadeusz Mazowiecki’s “thick line” (*gruba kreska*) by no means meant that the communist past was ruled out and even less a pact of silence (*pacto di silencio*) as had been the case in Spain.⁵⁷ It only meant a de facto am-

ciadla polskim (Gdańsk: Novus Orbis, 2001); and idem, “Spanien im polnischen Spiegel,” in *Diktaturbewältigung und nationale Selbstvergewisserung. Geschichtskulturen in Polen und Spanien im Vergleich*, eds. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and Stefan Troebst (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 15–23.

⁵⁵ Hanna Buchner, *Burgos 1975/76—Inowrocław 1989/90. Życie codzienne w miastach prowincjonalnych po upadku dyktatur/Provinzialtag nach der Diktatur* (Wrocław: ATUT, 2006). Also see the micro study of Asturian Llanes by Beatrice Schlee, “Endstation Vergangenheit? Schweigepakt und Erinnerungsgesetz am Fallbeispiel einer spanischen Kleinstadt,” in *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechtsverletzungen*, eds. Siegmund Schmidt, Gert Pickel, and Susanne Pickel (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 203–29.

⁵⁶ Beata Wojna, “Spain’s and Poland’s Road to NATO: The Problem of Continuity and Change in the Foreign Policy of a Democratizing State,” *European Review of History/Revue Européenne d’histoire* 15, no. 5 (2008): 533–47; and idem, *La política de seguridad en España y Polonia en la transición hacia la democracia: una análisis somparado* (Madrid: Universidad Complutense, 2004).

⁵⁷ Claudia Kraft, “Pacto de silencio und gruba kreska: Vom Umgang mit Vergangenheit in Transformationsprozessen,” in *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 97–107, here 103. Cf. also idem, “Diktaturbewältigung und Geschichtskultur in Polen und Spanien im Vergleich,” in *Diktaturbewältigung und nationale Selbstvergewisserung. Geschichtskulturen in Polen und Spanien im Vergleich*, eds. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and Stefan Troebst (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 37–44; idem, “‘Europäische Peripherien’—‘Europäische Identität’: Über den Umgang mit der Vergangenheit im zusammenwachsenden Europa am Beispiel Polens und Spaniens,” *Jahrbuch für Europäische Geschichte* 4 (2003): 11–37; idem, “Der Umgang mit der

nesty for middle and lower functionaries of the Communist Party and members of the State Security—note this was at a time when Soviet troops were still stationed not only around Poland's borders, but also in large numbers inside the country.⁵⁸ And different from the case of the “negotiated breach” (*ruptura pactada*) with the Franco dictatorship, which the majority of the Spanish equate to a national accomplishment, it is still hotly debated in Poland whether the gradual regime change negotiated in 1989 at the Round Table in Warsaw between Solidarność and the Communist Party—a procedure that served as a model across Eastern Europe—was indeed a clever evolutionary strategy because it avoided violence, or rather represented a scandalous compromise among elites that was alien to the country's revolutionary national tradition.

Even if Linz and Stepan assess the East European party dictatorships with tongue-in-cheek as a “prologue to postcommunism,” they do not yet argue in terms of the concept of post-(post)communism as it has been developed particularly by Anglo-American research in social anthropology.⁵⁹ Accordingly, they also do not pose the question whether, in the Southern and Eastern cases, “democracy” is the appropriate benchmark for transition. Are there not regionally severe democratic deficits in Southern and Eastern Europe, perhaps in the Spanish Basque province, where the state monopoly on force is very limited, or in the separatist, business criminal, and dictatorial eastern part of Moldova, known as the Moscow-controlled and self-proclaimed Dniester Republic, not to mention Lukashenko's “modern nondemocratic regime” in Belarus? And did it still make sense in 1996 to classify the East-Central European countries and the CIS states as belonging to the same regional phenotype, without regard to their indi-

mehrfachen Diktaturerfahrung im östlichen Europa,” in *Lange Schatten. Bewältigung von Diktaturen*, eds. Angela Borgstedt, Siegfried Frech, and Michael Stolle (Schwalbach: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2007), 63–89; as well as Sabine Grabowski, “Vergangenheitsbewältigung in Polen. Dossier und Analyse,” in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, eds. Helmut König, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Wöll (Opladen: Westdeutschen Verlag, 1998), 261–90; and Claudia Kraft, “Vom ‘dicken Strich’ zur ‘Durchleuchtung,’” *Osteuropa* 48, no. 10 (1998): 1015–23.

⁵⁸ Cf. Kazimierz Wóycicki, “Opfer und Täter—Die polnische Abrechnung mit der Geschichte nach 1989,” in *Vergangenheitsbewältigung am Ende des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts*, eds. Helmut König, Michael Kohlstruck, and Andreas Wöll (Opladen: Westdeutschen Verlag, 1998), 291–308; as well as his contribution to the discussion “Nach dem Fall des ‘Eisernen Vorhangs,’” in *ibid.*, 88–89.

⁵⁹ Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996); Christopher M. Hann, ed., *Postsocialism: Ideals, Ideologies and Practices in Eurasia* (London/New York: Routledge, 2002); *idem*, “*Not the Horse We Wanted!*” *Postsocialism, Neoliberalism, and Eurasia* (Münster: LIT, 2006). Cf. also the journal *Problems of Post-Communism* (till 1991 *Problems of Communism*); as well as Charles King, “Post-Postcommunism: Transition, Comparison, and the End of ‘Eastern Europe,’” *World Politics* 53, no. 1 (2000): 143–72; and Dieter Segert, ed., *Postsozialismus. Hinterlassenschaften des Staatssozialismus und neue Kapitalismen in Europa* (Wien: Wilhelm Braumüller Verlag, 2007).

vidually very different “legacies?” Would it not have been more appropriate to speak of a “two-speed Eastern Europe”?

“Defective” and “Liberal” Democracies? Wolfgang Merkel’s Comparison of Transitions

Wolfgang Merkel proposed just such a distinctiveness of a belt of countries from Estonia to Hungary within a larger “Eastern Europe” that included the CIS states and the Balkans, based on the work of Philippe C. Schmitter. Here Merkel drew out different speeds of consolidation: “The consolidation went faster in the young democracies in East-Central and Northeastern Europe than in it was the case in Spain and Portugal... Those young democracies of Northeastern and East-Central Europe are consolidated.”⁶⁰ Merkel had already pointed out differences regarding the levels of consolidation previously relative to the East European countries, which he classified as “liberal” and “defective” democracies.⁶¹

Here Merkel clearly delineates himself from Claus Offe’s explanatory pattern of an East European “dilemma of simultaneity” that functions as an obstacle to democratization, and thus, the simultaneous transitions from party dictatorship to democracy, from planned to market economy, from “Socialist legality” to the rule of law, and, in many cases, even from the status of a subject of a federation to a sovereign state.⁶² In Merkel’s view this is because Offe’s ap-

⁶⁰ Wolfgang Merkel, “Gegen alle Theorie? Die Konsolidierung der Demokratie in Ostmitteleuropa,” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 48, no. 3 (2007): 413–33, here 430. See also idem and Hans-Jürgen Puhle, eds. *Von der Diktatur zur Demokratie. Transformationen, Erfolgsbedingungen, Entwicklungspfade* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1999); as well as Philippe C. Schmitter, and Carsten Q. Schneider, “Liberalization, Transition and Consolidation: Measuring the Components of Democratization,” in *Consolidated or Defective Democracy? Problems of Regime Change*, eds. Aurel Croissant and Wolfgang Merkel, special issue of *Democratization* 11, no. 5 (Abingdon: Routledge, 2004), 59–90; Terry L. Karl and Philippe C. Schmitter, “Modes of Transition in Latin America, Southern and Eastern Europe,” *International Science Journal* 128 (1991): 269–84; Guillermo A. O’Donnell and Philippe C. Schmitter, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 3: Comparative Perspectives* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986); and idem, eds., *Transitions from Authoritarian Rule, Vol. 4: Tentative Conclusions about Uncertain Democracies* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

⁶¹ Table 1, “Typologie politischer Regimes,” in Wolfgang Merkel, “Totalitäre Regimes,” *Totalitarismus und Demokratie* 1, no. 1 (2004): 183–201, here 192.

⁶² Claus Offe, “Das Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit. Demokratisierung und Marktwirtschaft in Osteuropa,” *Merkur* 45, no. 4 (1991): 279–91. Cf. also idem, *Der Tunnel am Ende des Lichts. Erkundungen der politischen Transformation im Neuen Osten* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 1994), 57–80. A critical contribution to this topic from a trans-European perspective: Stefan Lessenich, “Spanischer Wein in osteuropäischen Schläuchen? Das Alte und das Neue am transformationspolitischen ‘Dilemma der Gleichzeitigkeit,’” in *Gesellschaften im Umbruch*.

proach neglects three central aspects that place Eastern Europe of the 1990s ahead of, rather than behind Southern Europe of the 1970s and 1980s: modernity, statehood, and the influence of external actors. His most convincing argument refers to the “extraordinarily high level of cultural and social modernity compared to interregional standards” produced by the “Socialist modernization dictatorships” in “the Baltic States and East Central Europe,”⁶³ which, due to its “contextual lack of complexity,” has been often overseen by “actor-focused” approaches to transformation studies. He especially highlights the level of formal education:

Behind the large problems of the post-Communist transformation, it remained buried to theorists that the modernization level in most countries of the Western part of Eastern Europe was higher than what ... was the case in Southern Europe of the 1970s. First of all, one decisive factor of modernization was only rarely taken into the prognosis: the level of education. However, the modernization-oriented democracy studies have long known that the level of education is a decisive predictor for sustained democracy... In Eastern Europe and especially in East-Central Europe, the level of education was higher than in the other transformation countries of the Third World.⁶⁴

One could extend the argument to include the degree of development level of the welfare state and the density of the civil society. In this context as well, important differences between the East and South, as well as within the East can be observed.⁶⁵ And political scientist Marianne Kneuer points out in her seminal study on “democratization through the EU” that in addition to the pull effect of “admission Europeanization” one could also observe “member Europeanization,”⁶⁶ with respect to the Spanish case, an effect that one could call “neighborhood democratization”: “It was ... a promoting aspect for democracy that the

Verhandlungen des 27. Kongresses der Deutschen Gesellschaft für Soziologie in Halle an der Saale 1995, ed. Lars Clausen (Frankfurt a. M.: Campus, 1996), 214–28.

⁶³ Merkel, “Gegen alle Theorie?,” 428. In addition to Merkel’s concept of socialist modernizing dictatorship, the contemporary historical research has produced the following termini: “welfare dictatorship,” “Socialist Party dictatorship,” “modern dictatorship of a communist type,” “bureaucratic dictatorship,” “educational dictatorship,” “surveillance dictatorship,” as well as “comfortable dictatorship.” Cf. Schmiechen-Ackermann, “Möglichkeiten und Grenzen des Diktaturvergleichs,” 60.

⁶⁴ Merkel, “Gegen alle Theorie?,” 428.

⁶⁵ Cf. for example, Manfred Hildermeier, Jürgen Kocka, and Christoph Conrad, eds., *Europäische Zivilgesellschaft in Ost und West. Begriff, Geschichte, Chancen* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 2000); and Hartmut Kaelble, *Sozialgeschichte Europas. 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* (München: C. H. Beck, 2007); and Hans Günter Hockerts, ed., *Drei Wege deutscher Sozialstaatlichkeit. NS-Diktatur, Bundesrepublik und DDR im Vergleich* (München: Oldenbourg, 1998).

⁶⁶ Heinz-Jürgen Axt, Antonio Milošoski, and Oliver Schwarz, “Europäisierung-ein weites Feld. Literaturbericht und Forschungsfragen,” *Politische Vierteljahresschrift* 48, no. 1 (2007): 136–49, here 142–44.

neighboring countries Portugal and Greece, which were, including Spain, the last right-wing dictatorships in Europe, were democratized as well.”⁶⁷

This applies to an even greater extent to postcommunist East-Central and Southeastern Europe, whereby temporary exceptions, such as Slovakia under Prime Minister Vladimír Mečiar between 1994 and 1998, explicitly prove this rule.⁶⁸

Another point of Merkel’s criticism regarding the “dilemma of simultaneity” concept refers to the underestimation of the factor of statehood, which he understands, following Linz and Stepan (and Georg Jellinek’s three-part theory), as “integrity of nation, territory, and state power,” as well as “administrative capacities of the state bureaucracy.”⁶⁹ Applying this criterion also to Eastern Europe, he stipulates a high potential for democratic consolidation in a “narrower” Eastern Europe from Tallinn to Ljubljana and of a lower one on the Balkans and in the CIS area:

In those countries ... without problems of statehood, the communist regime left a legacy of a fairly functional state, relatively large public resources and an understanding of the essential functions of the state... State-focused autocracies pass down a more positive legacy for democratization as dictatorships with weak state structures.⁷⁰

This constitutes another clear parallel development in Southern Europe during the second half of the 1970s, as well as Merkel’s third point of criticism against Offe, namely Offe’s focus on internal actors to the exclusion of external players. According to Merkel, in the Southeastern as well as in the East-Central European cases, the carrot of a potential accession to the European Community, and later European Union, should by no means be underestimated.⁷¹

Thus, according to Merkel, the legacy that the party dictatorships leave their successor societies is a matter of “state hardware” (e.g., the health and education systems), and “software” (e.g., the concept of state), irrespective of whether they might have attained a “defective” or “liberal” degree of democratization. With regard to Linz and Stepan’s idea of a “prologue to postcommunism,” it is important to underline that those factors are not restricted to the communist period. In the case of nation-states like Poland or Hungary, Estonia or Lithuania, both hardware and software date from a much older period and are therefore not part of a prologue to postcommunism but to communism. The admittedly weak democratic traditions of interwar Eastern Europe and the traditions

⁶⁷ Kneuer, *Demokratisierung durch die EU*, 197.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 311–32. Also see Rozaliya Dimitrova, “Verspäteter Autoritarismus: Die Slowakei 1993–1998,” in *Autoritarismus in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, ed. Jerzy Maćków (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 109–37.

⁶⁹ Merkel, “Gegen alle Theorie?,” 428.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 429.

⁷¹ Ibid., 429–30.

of statehood often go back to the nineteenth century or even to the early modern period and continue to have an effect today.⁷²

Regionalization and Rankings

In 2000, Carsten Goehrke, a scholar of Russian and East European history from Zürich developed a “comparative explanation based on European history landscapes” concerning the chances for transformation of the states and societies of Eastern Europe with regard to their “historic legacies.” Thereby, he divided this portion of the continent into four country groups based on their speed of transformation: (1) “The ‘leader’ East-Central Europe: Czech Republic, Estonia, Poland, Hungary, and Slovenia,”⁷³ (2) “the East-Central European laggards of the transformation process: Latvia, Lithuania, and Slovakia,”⁷⁴ (3) “countries in reverse or stuck: ... Russia, Croatia, Bulgaria, Romania, and Macedonia,”⁷⁵ and (4) “the tail lights of transformation: Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia, and Albania.”⁷⁶ In this context, Goehrke’s combined sociocultural and socioeconomic approach has a historical focus of a thousand years.

In 2005, I myself developed a typology of the different modes of how dictatorship is remembered in Eastern Europe and also came up with four categories: (1) society-wide anticommunist consensus (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovakia, Croatia, Kosovo), (2) vivid society-wide debates (Poland, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ukraine), (3) national(ist) rediscovery (Romania, Bulgaria, Macedonia, Albania, Slovenia, Serbia, Moldova), and (4) noncritical Soviet nostalgia (Russian Federation, Belarus, Dniester Republic).⁷⁷ Those memory-culture categories display not only a high level of congruency with Goehrke’s social science-orientated categorization, but also with the different genres of post-

⁷² See Dietrich Beyrau, “Zwischen Autonomie und Abhängigkeit: Ostmitteleuropa 1919–1939,” in *Die große Krise der dreißiger Jahre. Vom Niedergang der Weltwirtschaftskrise zum Zweiten Weltkrieg*, ed. Gerhard Schulz (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985), 179–99; Iván T. Berend, *The Crisis Zone of Europe: An Interpretation of East-Central European History in the First Half of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Wolfgang Höpken, “Strukturkrise oder verpasste Chance? Zum Demokratiepotential der südosteuropäischen Zwischenkriegsstaaten Bulgarien, Jugoslawien und Rumänien,” in *Ostmitteleuropa zwischen den beiden Weltkriegen (1918–1939). Stärke und Schwäche der neuen Staaten, nationale Minderheiten*, ed. Hans Lemberg (Marburg: Herder Institut, 1997), 73–127; and Andrew C. Janos, *East-Central Europe in the Modern World: The Politics of the Borderlands from Pre- to Postcommunism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2000).

⁷³ Goehrke, “Transformationschancen und historisches Erbe,” 718–24, here 718.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 724–27, here 724.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 727–33, here 727.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 733–35, here 733.

⁷⁷ Troebst, “Jalta versus Stalingrad, GULag versus Holocaust,” 381–400.

communist societies identified by Linz and Stepan as well as by Merkel, that is, “liberal democracies” with either a high or a low level of statehood or “defect democracies” with a favorable or less favorable prognosis for the future. Considering the fact that all those approaches focus on social elites, their congruence is hardly surprising. At the same time, my own model of regionalization reveals a pattern whose congruency with national, federal, or bloc structures is only partial. The fifteen successor states to the USSR are present in all four categories, the seven countries of post-Tito Yugoslavia in two of the four, namely in (1) and (3), and even “non-postcommunist” countries in Northeastern and Southeastern Europe like Finland and Greece can be easily categorized according to this pattern—again in (1) and (3). It seems as if constructs of historical mesoregions referring to structural factors *à la longue durée* or to historical path dependency, such as “East-Central Europe,” “the Balkans,” “Northeastern Europe,” or “Southern Europe,” are helpful for the explanation of long-term patterns of cultures of remembrance as well.⁷⁸ Nevertheless, here it is important to mind the possible trap of self-referentiality, as is proven in the example of Oskar Halecki, an exiled Polish US historian of Croatian descent who was born in Vienna. His regional historical subdivision of Europe in general and Eastern Europe in particular that, according to his assertions, was based on cultural and religious long-term factors, may feature concepts dating back to the Middle Ages, but shows a striking resemblance to the factual borderlines of the Cold War.⁷⁹ From a post-1989 perspective, the most epistemologically promis-

⁷⁸ A fundamental contribution to this topic: Klaus Zernack, *Osteuropa. Eine Einführung in seine Geschichte* (München: C. H. Beck 1977), 33–41. For examples from Southern, Western, and Northern Europe that include an East-European–Eurasian focus, see Stefan Troebst, ed., *Geschichtsregionen: Concept and Critique*, special issue of *European Review of History/Revue européenne d'histoire* 10, no. 2 (Milton Park: Taylor and Francis, 2003); and, more recently, Frithjof Benjamin Schenk and Martina Winkler, eds., *Der Süden. Neue Perspektiven auf eine europäische Geschichtsregion* (Frankfurt a. M./New York: Campus, 2007). Regarding the heuristic-comparative concept of *Geschichtsregion*, cf. Arno Strohmeier, “Historische Komparatistik und die Konstruktion von Geschichtsregionen: der Vergleich als Methode der historischen Europaforschung,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte und Kultur Südosteuropas* 1 (1999): 39–55; Christian Giordano, “Interdependente Vielfalt. Die historischen Regionen Europas,” in *Europa und die Grenzen im Kopf*, eds. Karl Kaser, Dagmar Gramshammer-Hohl, and Robert Richler (Klagenfurt: Wieser, 2003), 113–35; Stefan Troebst, “Vom spatial turn zum regional turn? Geschichtsregionale Konzeptionen in den Kulturwissenschaften,” in *Dimensionen der Kultur- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte. Festschrift für Hannes Siegrist zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. Matthias Middell (Leipzig: Leipziger Universitätsverlag, 2007), 143–59; and Stefan Troebst, “Meso-Regionalizing Europe: History versus Politics,” in *Domains and Divisions of European History*, eds. Johann P. Arnason and Natalie J. Doyle (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2010), 78–89.

⁷⁹ Oscar Halecki, *The Limits and Divisions of European History* (London/New York: Sheed & Ward, 1950); and idem, *Borderlands of Western Civilization: A History of East Central Europe* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1952). See also Stefan Troebst, “Halecki Revisited:

ing aspect of Halecki's structural model was in its application of the European memory-cultural mesoregions: according to Halecki, in the Middle Ages, Europe consisted of three key historic regions, namely Western Europe, Central Europe, and Eastern Europe (a division he deems still valid today), completed by a further subdivision of Central into West Central and East-Central Europe. Those four mesoregions can also be distinguished with regard to the national cultures of remembrance of present-day Europe: (a) the "trans-Atlantically" oriented Western Europe, consisting of the Second World War allies Great Britain and France, but also of Northern Europe, the Benelux states and the South European countries Italy, Spain, and Portugal, (b) the "ambivalent" as well as partially twice "postdictatorially" coded West-Central Europe, thus the "old" Federal Republic of Germany and the GDR, or rather the reunified Germany and Austria, (c) postcommunist East-Central Europe, i.e., the Baltic states, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and the Balkan region including Greece, which, according to Halecki, shows as a whole Hellenic, Byzantine, Ottoman, and Orthodox influences and, finally (d) post-Soviet Eastern Europe: the CIS republics emerged from the Soviet Union, including the Russian Federation, but in Halecki's concept, excluding the Ukraine and Belarus as parts of East-Central Europe. The severe differences among those four European memory-regions can be easily displayed on the radar screen of the Europeans' remembrance of the "age of extremes," namely by confrontation with all-European *lieux de mémoire* like 1939, 1945, and 1989 (with 1956 and 1968 as interim stages).⁸⁰

The subdivision of Eastern Europe into four mostly geographically contingent memory-regions as outlined above coincides to a large extent with the "attempt of a critical account of the research on the relationship between institutions and democratic consolidation" recently undertaken by the political scien-

Europe's Conflicting Cultures of Remembrance," in *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance*, eds. Bo Stråth and Małgorzata Pakier (Oxford/New York: Berghahn, 2010), 56–63.

⁸⁰ See Stefan Troebst, "Der 23. August 1939. Ein europäischer *Lieu de mémoire*?", in *Diktatoren am Schachbrett—Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt, der Krieg und die europäische Erinnerung*, eds. Manfred Sapper and Volker Weichsel, special issue of *Osteuropa* 59, no. 7–8 (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009), 249–56; idem, "'1945' als europäischer Erinnerungsort?", in *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 223–32; idem, "Von Nikita Khrushchev zu Sandra Kalniete. Der *lieu de mémoire* '1956' und Europas aktuelle Erinnerungskonflikte," *Comparativ* 16, no. 1 (2006): 150–70; idem, "'1989' as a European *Lieu de Mémoire*, or: Is the Postwar Period Over?", in Körber-Stiftung, ed., *1989 im europäischen Kontext* (Hamburg: Körber-Stiftung, 2009), see <http://www.koerber-stiftung.de/bildung/dossiers/1989-im-europaeischen-kontext.html>. Regarding "1945," cf. also Dan Diner, "Reims, Karlshorst, Sétif: Die multiple Bedeutung des 8. Mai 1945," in *Was heißt und zu welchem Ende studiert man Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts?*, ed. Norbert Frei (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2007), 190–95.

tist Timm Beichelt.⁸¹ Based on three indicators (elections, political rights, and governmental commitment to established law), he, too, identified four categories that form regional clusters: (1) formally democratic regimes (Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, and Hungary), (2) minimally democratic regimes (Bulgaria, Croatia, Romania, Serbia, and the Ukraine), (3) a “grey zone,” primarily due to election fraud and a lack of freedom of the media (Albania, Macedonia, and Moldova), and (4) autocratic regimes (Belarus, the Russian Federation).⁸² By judging the former affiliation either to the Habsburg Empire or to Brandenburg-Prussia, or rather to the German Reich, as a “supporting contextual prerequisite,” but the affiliation to “the Russian or Ottoman dominated area” as an inhibiting factor, Beichelt, too, provides his explanatory model with a historical “bumper.”⁸³ The substantial congruence of all three models of categorization described above, individually based on history, memory cultures, or democratic consolidation, proves the high correlation between the level of democratization and the intensity of processing dictatorial past once again.

The Swedish political scientists Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde produced another attempt at categorization, choosing the criterion of nostalgia for an authoritarian past in transforming societies as a *tertium comparationis*.⁸⁴ In this context, they are referring to Linz and Stepan’s above-mentioned assumption that a romanticized vision of a dictatorial past and the consolidation of democracy do not exclude each other. Ekman and Linde’s key question, asked with regard to the ten current EU member countries in Eastern Europe, is:

[I]s the presence of authoritarian rule nostalgia an indication of genuine non-democratic values among citizens in contemporary Central and Eastern Europe, acquired as the result of political socialization in the old, communist-authoritarian system? Or, is the presence of nostalgia quite simply brought about by a perceived output deficit, and related to the general discontent with the democratic system’s performance ability?⁸⁵

⁸¹ Timm Beichelt, “Die Rolle der politischen Institutionen im Prozess der Demokratieconsolidierung in Mittel- und Osteuropa,” in *Totalitarismus und Transformation. Defizite der Demokratieconsolidierung in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, eds. Uwe Backes, Tytus Jaskułowski, and Abel Polese (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 49–62.

⁸² Cf. Table 2, “Indikatoren für demokratische Konsolidierung in Osteuropa (as of 2006),” and Table 3, “Demokratische Konsolidierung im postsozialistischen Europa und institutionelle Grundform (as of 2006),” *ibid.*, 55 and 60.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, 57.

⁸⁴ Joakim Ekman and Jonas Linde, “Fond Memories of Dictatorships? Nostalgia and Support for Democracy in Post-Communist Europe,” in *Totalitarismus und Transformation. Defizite der Demokratieconsolidierung in Mittel- und Osteuropa*, eds. Uwe Backes, Tytus Jaskułowski, and Abel Polese (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 241–60.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 245. Cf. also Andrew Roberts, “The Politics and Anti-Politics of Nostalgia,” *East European Politics and Society* 16, no. 3 (2003): 764–809; Gert Pickel, “Nostalgie oder Problembewusstsein? Demokratisierungshindernisse aus der Bewältigung von Vergangenheit in Osteu-

They conclude that, on the one hand, the Baltic states compose a distinct group because their societies' level of nostalgia is—with 6 to 11% of positive respondents (2004)—remarkably low and increased only minimally since 1995. In this context, Latvia, with an increase from 7 to 11%, turns out to be the regional leader.⁸⁶ On the other hand, they observed that the percentage of respondents who favor a return to the communist model of rule is remarkably higher than in the Baltic states, with 14–31%, among all other East European EU member countries. Bulgaria (31%), where the percentage was already the highest (25%) in 1993, is ranked first. Slovakia made the most obvious jump between 1993 and 2004 (from 16 to 28%), while the Czech Republic trailed the list (7 and 14%) in both 1993 and 2004, respectively. One could observe the highest amplitude in either direction in Poland: Between 1993 and 1995 from 17 down to 8%, and between 1995 and 2004 from 8 up to 24%. Overall, the percentage of “nostalgics” in the seven non-Baltic East-Central and Southeastern EU countries increased between 1993 and 2004 from around 10% to almost 30%. The only outlier from this tendency is Hungary, where the level of affirmation for a return to communism decreased from 18 to 14% during the period in question.⁸⁷

Furthermore, Ekman and Linde can demonstrate, on the one hand, that the level of nostalgia increases in correlation to age: in 2004, in all ten East European EU countries among respondents older than fifty, twice as high as among members of the eighteen to twenty-nine age group.⁸⁸ On the other hand they observe that the level of nostalgia coincides directly with the judgment about the former economic system. In 2004 only Estonians and Czechs considered the market economy superior to the command economy. All others were of the opposite opinion, led by Slovaks and Bulgarians.⁸⁹ Yet, it is remarkable that in 2004 not only Czechs and Latvians considered their personal economic situation more favorable than during state socialism, but also Slovenes and Romanians. All others considered it to be worse.⁹⁰ Even though the different dates of accession to EU have to be included in this calculation, there is a clear correlation between the level of nostalgia on one hand, and the level of democratization and dealing with the past, on the other hand.

ropa,” in *Amnesie, Amnestie oder Aufarbeitung? Zum Umgang mit autoritären Vergangenheiten und Menschenrechtsverletzungen*, eds. Siegmund Schmidt, Gert Pickel, and Susanne Pickel (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2009), 129–58; and Todorova and Gille, eds., *Post-Communist Nostalgia*.

⁸⁶ “Approval of a return to Communist rule in the Baltic countries (%),” in Ekman and Linde, “Fond Memories of Dictatorships?,” 249.

⁸⁷ “Approval of a return to Communist rule in Central and Eastern Europe (%),” in *ibid.*, 248.

⁸⁸ “Approval of a return to Communist rule by age (%),” in *ibid.*, 251.

⁸⁹ “Evaluation of the past and present economic system (%),” in *ibid.*, 254.

⁹⁰ “Evaluation of the past and present personal economic situation (%),” in *ibid.*, 255.

Unfortunately, there are no studies on the level of nostalgia for dictatorship in Greece, Portugal, and Spain that could be compared to the research on Eastern Europe. However, for the Spanish case, Xosé-Manoel Núñez Seixas discovered that the percentage of those who “have not forgotten” the Spanish Civil War provoked by Franco’s dictatorial regime, increased between 1995 and 2000 from 40 to 51%, and in 2006, 64.5% of the Spanish participants polled pronounced themselves in favor of a critical public discussion of the causes and consequences of the Civil War, 25.5% were against and 10% were either ambivalent or did not have an opinion.⁹¹

On the one hand, the empirical sociological research and its regionalized rankings show that transformation processes can proceed very different even in neighboring societies. On the other hand, a geographical mapping of those research results proves that one can define regional clusters—the Baltic states, the Visegrád Group (Poland, Hungary, and Czechoslovakia [or rather, Slovakia and the Czech Republic]), the Balkans, the CIS, etc.—which are defined by differences and commonalities that can be tracked back to the recent but not least also to a more distant past. In this context, historical approaches are by no means a Procrustean bed, but offer the possibility to explain phenomena, which, according to social scientists, can’t be sufficiently explained by their own methods.

Europeanization of Processes of Coming to Terms with Dictatorship? Pan-European Institutions as Generators of European Identity Politics

In the social and cultural sciences, the debate is in full swing whether “Europe” needs its own culture of remembrance to support the processes of European identification—and sequentially must develop its own trans-European politics of history—or if such a “European memory” is already emerging.⁹² In this con-

⁹¹ Xosé-Manoel Núñez, “Zwischen Gedächtnis und Politik: Die spanische Zivilgesellschaft und die Aufarbeitung der franquistischen Diktatur,” in *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 160–74, here 160.

⁹² Cf. Christian Joerges, Matthias Mahlmann, and Ulrich K. Preuss, eds., “*Schmerzliche Erfahrungen der Vergangenheit*” und der Prozess der Konstitutionalisierung Europas (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2008); Konrad H. Jarausch and Thomas Lindenberger, eds., *Conflicted Memories: Europeanizing Contemporary Histories* (New York/Oxford: Berghahn, 2007); Stråth and Pakier, eds., *A European Memory?*; as well as Etienne François “Ist eine gesamteuropäische Erinnerungskultur vorstellbar?,” in *Transnationale Erinnerungsorte. Nord- und südeuropäische Perspektiven*, eds. Bernd Henningsen, Hendriette Kliemann-Geisinger, and Stefan Troebst (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschafts-Verlag, 2009), 13–30; Birgit Schwellung, “Das Gedächtnis Europa. Eine Diagnose,” in *Europa-Studien. Eine Einführung*, eds. Timm Beichelt et al. (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2006), 81–94; idem, “Erinnerung als Medium der kulturellen Integration Europas?,” in *Die kulturelle Integration Europas*, eds. Johan-

text, the adopted positions range from the need for intellectual administrative assistance to the bureaucrats in Brussels, to the proposal that the academic world abstain from European identity politics. In this vein, Claus Leggewie made the advisory suggestion with the highest practical relevance, wherein he referred to “anchors and vanishing points of a supranational and transnational memory” that is arranged in the form of seven “concentric circles.”⁹³ According to Leggewie, they possess the potential to construct a qualitatively new identity of the Europeans as the “largest not-yet-existing nation on earth,” in the shape of a “shared historical awareness” that can be, until then, observed only for individual nations. Hereby, the first five of his circles are “the grand catastrophes of the long twentieth century,” namely the Holocaust as the memorial nucleus, the Gulag, ethnic cleansings, the Ottoman-Turkish genocide against the Armenians, and colonialism. The sixth circle, “Europe as a continent of immigration,” has an ambivalent nature, and only the seventh, “Europe’s story of success after 1945” is clearly positive.

Leggewie’s “concentric circles” are exclusively based on practical politics of memory. This is because the pan-European institutions like the European Union and the Council of Europe, also peripherally the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), have identified this policy field as a branch of European identity management and thus as a new and promising area of action. Accordingly, they formulate in part informally, in part officially, their own politics of history, which they try out experimentally. Even though in regards to identity politics the consensus about a division of labor between the EU, on one hand (and here the European Parliament, in particular) and the Council of Europe, on the other hand (here, too, the Parliamentary Assembly as a driving force) is decreasing by now.⁹⁴ Even in present times, European history, as well

nes Wienand and Christiane Wienand (Wiesbaden: VS Verlag für Sozialwissenschaften, 2010), 212–34; Aleida Assmann, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2006), 250–79; Henry Rousso, “Das Dilemma eines europäischen Gedächtnisses,” *Zeithistorische Forschungen* 1, no. 2 (2004): 363–78; Klaus Kiran Patel, “Europas Symbole. Integrationsgeschichte und Identitätssuche seit 1945,” *Internationale Politik* 59, no. 4 (2004): 11–18; and Michael Jeismann, “Schuld—der neue Gründungsmythos Europas? Die Internationale Holocaust-Konferenz von Stockholm (26.–28. Januar 2000) und eine Moral, die nach hinten losgeht,” *Historische Anthropologie* 8, no. 3 (2000): 454–58.

⁹³ Claus Leggewie, “Schlachtfeld Europa. Transnationale Erinnerung und europäische Identität,” *Blätter zur deutschen und internationalen Politik* 64, no. 2 (2009): 81–93. See also idem, *Der Kampf und die europäische Erinnerung. Ein Schlachtfeld wird besichtigt* (München: C. H. Beck, 2011); and Stefan Troebst, “Konzentrische Kreise oder Haleckische Geschichtsregionen? Kommentar zu Claus Leggewies ‘Schlachtfeld Europa,’” in *Kultur im Konflikt. Claus Leggewie revisited*, eds. Christoph Bieber, Benjamin Drechsel, and Anne-Katrin Lang (Bielefeld: Transcript, 2010), 49–54.

⁹⁴ See also Katrin Hammerstein and Birgit Hofmann, “Europäische ‘Interventionen’: Resolutionen und Initiativen zum Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit,” in *Aufarbeitung der*

as European values, are the domain of the oldest pan-European institution in Strasbourg. But, in contrast to the areas of human rights and minority protection, the Council of Europe's balance in politics of history is somewhat patchy at best. The major aim to establish a "European remembrance center for victims of forced population movements and ethnic cleansing" under the auspices of Strasbourg, brought before the Parliamentary Assembly on a Polish–German initiative in 2004–2006, failed twice because of a French–Turkish–Russian alliance to reject the measure.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, this is countered by two successful, parallel advances to condemn the Franco regime made by the Parliamentary Assembly in 2006 (recommendation 1736/2006), as well as to "dismantle the heritage of the former communist totalitarian systems" (resolution 1481/2006) which, in terms of their wording, are very similar or even congruent.⁹⁶ The latter initiative met the agreement of the representatives from East-Central and Southeastern Europe, but was rejected by their Russian colleagues. With regard to the parliamentarians from the "old" Western Europe, the voting showed a clear, ideological division line between the right wing (agreement) and left wing (rejection). And while the resolution was broadly greeted in politics and in the media in Eastern Europe, it remained almost unnoticed in the Western public sphere.⁹⁷

Obviously, compared to the Council of Europe, the EU is provided with incomparably larger resources for the development of European-wide efficient politics of history. The European Parliament and Commission played off this advantage in 2008–2009 when they decided to found a House of European History, planned as centre for exhibitions, documentation, and information, commissioned the necessary conception, appointed organizational staff, and bought real estate in Brussels.⁹⁸ The "thematic guidelines for the permanent exhibition"

Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 189–203, here 191–94.

⁹⁵ Stefan Troebst, "Europäisierung der Vertreibungserinnerung? Eine deutsch-polnische *Chronique scandaleuse* 2002–2007," in *Verflochtene Erinnerungen. Polen und seine Nachbarn im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Martin Aust, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and idem (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2009), 245–74; and Stefan Troebst, ed., *Vertreibungsdiskurs und europäische Erinnerungskultur. Deutsch-polnische Initiativen zur Institutionalisierung. Eine Dokumentation* (Osnabrück: fibre, 2006).

⁹⁶ Hammerstein and Hofmann, "Europäische 'Interventionen,'" 194.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196–202.

⁹⁸ Matthias Hannemann, "Terror und Traum. Die Europa-Pläne des Bonner Hauses der Geschichte," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 15 December 2008, 33; Leggewie, *Der Kampf und die europäische Erinnerung*, 46–48, 72, 182–88, 216–19; and Włodzimierz Borodziej, "Das Haus der Europäischen Geschichte—ein Erinnerungskonzept mit dem Mut zur Lücke," in *Arbeit am europäischen Gedächtnis. Diktaturerfahrungen und Demokratieentwicklung*, ed. Volkhard Knigge et al. (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2011), 139–46. For a general overview, see Stefan Troebst, "Die Europäische Union als 'Gedächtnis und Gewissen Europas'? Zur EU-

of this new museum explicitly mention the “processes of democratic transformation” in Southern Europe in the mid-1970s, as well as the interconnected regime change in Eastern Europe in 1989:

In Greece the Colonels’ regime collapsed in 1974, and in that same year the Portuguese dictatorship ended. In both countries, as in Spain a year later, the dictatorial regimes were replaced by parliamentary democracies. The “Carnation Revolution” in Portugal in 1974 also put an end to the wars in Africa: Portugal became the last country in Europe to grant independence to its colonies, Angola and Mozambique. Following the death of the dictator Franco on 20 November 1975, the peaceful transition from dictatorship to democracy in Spain was a widely admired phenomenon which was later to influence events in the Eastern Bloc states in the late 1980s.⁹⁹

As further proof that the EU, in the form of the European Parliament, by now has a more active approach to the politics of history than the Council of Europe’s Parliamentary Assembly, which is clearly handicapped by members such as the Russian Federation or Turkey, can be found in the initiative for the proclamation of 23 August (the day of the signing of the Nazi–Soviet Pact by the Ministers of Foreign Affairs Joachim von Ribbentrop and Vyacheslav M. Molotov in Moscow in 1939) as a European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism with the goal “to maintain the remembrance of the victims of mass deportations and extinction and thereby reinforce democracy and promote peace and stability on our continent.”¹⁰⁰ This initiative came from the European Parliament in 2008, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe only followed suite in 2009.¹⁰¹ In other words, Brussels and Strasbourg designated the debate about identity, the public sphere, and the “European” level of democratization as a lever of the politics of history and are apt to apply it, even if at times awkwardly.

Geschichtspolitik seit der Osterweiterung,” in *Geschichtspolitik in Europa seit 1989. Deutschland, Frankreich und Polen im internationalen Vergleich*, eds. Etienne François et. al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2013), 94–155.

⁹⁹ Committee of Experts, House of European History, *Conceptional Basis for a House of European History* (Brussels: House of European History, 2008), 22, http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/745/745721/745721_en.pdf.

¹⁰⁰ Declaration of the European Parliaments regarding the Proclamation of August 23 as European Memorial Day for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism, Brussels, 28 September 2008, <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P6-TA-2008-0439+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>. Cf. also Hammerstein and Hofmann, “Europäische ‘Interventionen,’” 202; and Stefan Troebst, “Der 23. August als euroatlantischer Gedenktag? Eine analytische Dokumentation,” in *Der Hitler-Stalin-Pakt 1939 in den Erinnerungskulturen der Europäer*, eds. Anna Kaminsky, Dietmar Müller, and Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2011), 85–121.

¹⁰¹ “Für den 23. August als Gedenktag,” *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 4 July 2008, 6. For contextualization, cf. Troebst, “Der 23. August 1939,” and idem, “Der 23. August als euroatlantischer Gedenktag?”

South and East European (Dictatorships and) Remembrance of Dictatorships in Comparison: Interim Results

Considering the comparability, even similarity in structure and function of the dictatorships in Southern and Eastern Europe, can Linz and Stepan's suggestion of comparability or similarity of remembrance among present postdictatorial societies indeed be confirmed? They are comparable, of course, in the sense that in principle everything can be compared, even in the case of nonresemblance. But similarity? Hardly, because history, memory, and remembrance are interdependent and closely related to the semantic field of "nation." Just as the nations of Europe and their individual historical master narratives are different, so their memories of dictatorship—and their strategies for coming to terms with their dictatorial pasts—are diverse. Yet one aspect is shared by all societies concerned: their democratic design is, to a large extent, influenced by the experience of dictatorship and overcoming it. This also applies for their respective historical cultures, without regard to whether they are characterized by a critical approach to the dictatorial past or by its deliberate exclusion from the national narrative. Compared to the collective memory of societies without personal dictatorial experiences, the historical culture of postdictatorial societies appears either as being "obsessed by history" or conversely, "ignorant of history."¹⁰² Regarding the ways a society handles its dictatorial past, it seems as if there is no mediocrity (or, what Timothy Garton Ash calls "mesomnesia")¹⁰³ but only the extremes of amnesia or pathomnesia. In contrast, the latter two are not exclusive, but generally successive, as could be observed in 2000 in the context of the opening of the Franquist mass graves in Spain, or, in the same year, in connection with the remembrance of the Jedwabne pogrom in Poland of 1941.¹⁰⁴ In both cases, the societal consensus of

¹⁰² Regarding the concept, cf. Aleida Assmann and Ute Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit, Geschichtsversessenheit. Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999). See also Ute Frevert, "Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit revisited. Der jüngste Erinnerungsboom in der Kritik," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 40–41 (2003): 6–13.

¹⁰³ Garton Ash, "Mesomnesie," 32.

¹⁰⁴ Emilio Silva Barrera, "The Importance of Remembrance in the Transition to Democracy in Spain," in *Diktaturbewältigung und nationale Selbstvergewisserung. Geschichtskulturen in Polen und Spanien im Vergleich*, eds. Krzysztof Ruchniewicz and Stefan Troebst (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Wrocławskiego, 2004), 69–74; Walther L. Bernecker and Sören Brinkmann, *Kampf der Erinnerungen. Der Spanische Bürgerkrieg in Politik und Gesellschaft 1936–2006* (Nettersheim: Verlag Graswurzelrevolution, 2006); Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, "Die historische Erinnerung in Polen," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 5–6 (2005): 18–26; and idem, "'Die Jedwabne-Debatte' in Polen. Das schwierigste und schmerzlichste Kapitel der polnisch-jüdischen Beziehungen," in *Verflochtene Erinnerungen. Polen und seine Nachbarn im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert*, eds. Martin Aust, Krzysztof Ruchniewicz, and Stefan Troebst (Köln/Weimar/Wien: Böhlau, 2009), 189–98.

keeping silent and the patterns of repressing remembrance broke down, initializing painful public discourses of self-reassurance.

It is probably undisputed that “the overcoming of the consequences of dictatorships is a key symptom of the past twentieth century,” and that it furthermore remains “an important task for the twenty-first century,” as the editors of a recent German anthology about the subject put it.¹⁰⁵ Yet the hope of one of the most important figures in German politics of history, Marianne Birthler, the former federal commissioner of the Stasi archives, is “that in Europe one day there will be standards that one can use in overcoming dictatorships,”¹⁰⁶ is problematic in two respects. On one hand, it has to remain open whether this hope will ever be fulfilled, and on the other hand, it is questionable if in a Europe of diverse nations and cultures, such “standards” would ever be functional—leaving aside the underlying *mission civilisatrice* of the Office of the Federal Commissioner for Preserving the Records of the State Security Service of the former German Democratic Republic. With regard to Eastern Europe, Garton Ash also attested the German model to “have set a new norm of completeness,” but at the same time, he referred to it ironically as a “DIN (German Industrial Norm) standard”¹⁰⁷ and an “ISO (International Organization for Standardization) for Historiography.”¹⁰⁸ However, Simone Veil, the former president of the European Parliament and an Auschwitz survivor, made a sincere appeal on 27 January 2004, International Holocaust Remembrance Day, when she called upon the German Bundestag to fight postcommunist repression of the Holocaust memory and anti-Semitism “in some East European countries”:

As Europe expands toward the East, we need to be alarmed by these drifts, because these apparent historical controversies deeply affect the identity of the Europe of the future. Since she has experienced both forms of totalitarianism, the now reunified Germany can most likely help the new member states to calmly resolve this asymmetry of memory.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Angela Borgstedt, Siegfried Frech, and Michael Stolle, “Bewältigung von Diktaturen,” in *Lange Schatten. Bewältigung von Diktaturen*, eds. Angela Borgstedt, Siegfried Frech, and Michael Stolle (Schwalbach: Wochenschau-Verlag, 2007), 7–16, here 7.

¹⁰⁶ *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 20 July 2006, quoted by Hammerstein and Hofmann, “Europäische ‘Interventionen,’” 189. Cf. also Marianne Birthler, “Instrumentarien der Auseinandersetzung mit der Diktatur—ein internationaler Vergleich,” in *Nach dem Fall des ‘Eisernen Vorhangs.’ Geschichte und Öffentlichkeit im europäischen Vergleich*, ed. Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Zeitgeschichtliches Forum Leipzig (Leipzig: Nicolai, 2002), 73–84.

¹⁰⁷ Timothy Garton Ash, “Strafgerichte, Säuberungen und Geschichtsstunden,” in *Zeit der Freiheit. Aus den Zentren des neuen Europa*, ed. Timothy Garton Ash (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1999), 308–33, here 309.

¹⁰⁸ Idem, “Mesomnesie,” 33.

¹⁰⁹ Simone Veil, “Fondation pour la memoire de Shoa Speech by Mrs Simone Veil before the Bundestag, Berlin, January 24, 2004,” <http://www.fondationshoah.org/FMS/DocPdfUS/Discours/Bundenstag2004.pdf>.

Thus: *The Germans to the front!*, but not in uniform this time, as during the Chinese Boxer Rebellion in 1900, but in civilian teachers' clothing? Contrary to dealing with the consequences of dictatorial regimes, in the fight against anti-Semitism, there is no sign that the foreign politics of history of the postdictatorial Germany intends to impose its *Sonderweg* on other societies, and this for very obvious reasons. No such strategy would work anyway because every dictatorship and every collaborating regime is decidedly influenced by national specificities and, accordingly, its remembrance is also primarily a national one. According to this, the attempt to come to terms with the past (no matter whether it may be political, historical, juridical, etc.) has to be painstakingly tailored to every national case. In this context, the approach applied by the neighbors or the rest of the world can be taken as an inspiration, yet not as a blueprint, or, even less, as an import article.¹¹⁰ The assumption that even in a united Europe, a society's ways of coming to terms with its dictatorial past can be a rocky and tedious path, full of dead ends, setbacks, hypocrisy, and the fury of vengeance, is proven by the recent societal processes in Spain and Poland in relation to the opening of the mass graves and to the Jedwabne killings. More than fifty years ago, the German medievalist Herrmann Heimpel put the dialectics of nation-state and integration concepts in Europe into a complicated, but for that reason appropriate, formula: "The idea of the nation is a European idea; Europe is characterized by its national fragmentation but the nations characterize Europe."¹¹¹ This applies in particular to Europe's postdictatorial cultures of remembrance.

Conclusion

Dictatorship, recalling Maurice Duverger's words,¹¹² doesn't "constantly threaten our generation" anymore, but it continues to engage European societies, and this all the more as national public spheres in Europe begin to discuss their dictatorial pasts, which until recently have often been ignored, and as European institutions feel compelled to develop European-wide politics of history. Nevertheless, there is another reason that has been hauntingly named (directly referring to Duverger's warning of the "wild beast" dictatorship in 1961)

¹¹⁰ Cf. e.g., Dorota Dakowska, "Aufarbeitung 'Made in Poland' und die Frage nach dem deutschen Standard—IPN und BStU im Vergleich," in *Aufarbeitung der Diktatur—Diktatur der Aufarbeitung? Normierungsprozesse beim Umgang mit diktatorischer Vergangenheit*, eds. Katrin Hammerstein et al. (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2009), 86–96.

¹¹¹ Hermann Heimpel, "Europa und seine mittelalterliche Grundlegung," in idem, *Der Mensch in seiner Gegenwart. Sieben historische Essays* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1954), 67–86, here 68.

¹¹² Duverger, *De la dictature*, 7.

by the Romanian-born Nobel Laureate for Literature, Herta Müller, in her Nobel Prize banquet speech on 10 December 2009:

Because to this very day there are dictatorships of every stripe. Some go on forever, always frightening us anew, such as Iran. Others, such as Russia and China, don cloaks of respectability; they liberalize their economies, but human rights remain firmly in the grip of Stalinism or Maoism. And then there are the half-democracies of Eastern Europe, which since 1989 have been putting on and taking off their respectable cloaks so often they're practically in tatters.¹¹³

With regard to Romania, which she knows the best, Belarus and Serbia, maybe also Bulgaria and the Ukraine, this writer, who belongs to a generation that has been traumatized long-term by dictatorial experiences, is possibly right—but not in regard to Poland or Latvia, and certainly not regarding Southern Europe.

The continent-wide and systematic processing of the numerous and often successive dictatorships in Southern and Eastern Europe is still at the very beginning. This has visible consequences for the political and historical cultures of the societies in question. As in the humanities and social sciences, also in governmental politics of history, the comparative view on European (and non-European) neighbors can be inspiring.

Translation by Bradley Schmidt

¹¹³ Herta Müller, "Banquet Speech: Herta Müller's Speech at the Nobel Banquet, 10 December 2009," translation of the German text, http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/2009/muller-speech_en.html.

7. Communism Reloaded

Milla Mineva

It is hard for someone born in 1975 to tell the story of her personal position before 1989. It is even harder for someone seduced by the life stories of others. Briefly, we are the children of socialism. It has faded away along with our childhood. I was fourteen when I stepped out on the square to celebrate the end of communism. My passion then was the passion of my parents and my teachers, their smiles made me smile, their zeal led me to the rallies.

Today I know that I can narrate the story of my childhood in different modes. My mother and father were nonparty engineers. My father was the descendent of an old “bourgeois” family and thus enemy of the regime, convinced that communism would be forever. He loved to tell political jokes and subscribed to the satirical weekly Stîrshel. After the fall of communism he started drawing different entrepreneurial plans, but time was insufficient to materialize any of them (thanks to one of these plans I now own the collected works of Todor Zhivkov, an archival legacy from the company’s library). I grew up with stories about my paternal grandparents, whose personal trajectories had been derailed by the communist regime. I hardly remember them, but I remember my mom’s father, who raised me. He read the official party paper Rabotnichesko delo every single day and constantly nibbled at the power very loudly (maybe because he was partly deaf). When he was young, he had even written a letter against someone in power and had traveled to a nearby town, Pernik, to send it secretly, to avoid risks to himself and his family. In fact, a distant relative in a high position, not the post office in Pernik, had saved the family from the stigma. It is easy starting from here to tell the story of repression against my own family. Such stories were abundant after 1989, and my mother to this day is strongly convinced that my father was repressed, because he never became the manager of the company he worked in.

I can start my story from a completely different perspective: I was born in the center of Sofia, my mother was a department head in an engineering company, and my father was a deputy manager occupied with plans for the remote

2000. *We were in Libya, my dad worked in Iraq, my uncle and my aunt were always somewhere abroad (in Sweden, in the USA), bringing back tons of presents. On Christmas we would usually go to the Corecom—mom's goal was to find something useful of high quality (a pullover, for instance) as a present for me, and I would pick according to the price so that the change would suffice for a chocolate egg. I was an excellent and ambitious student so I naturally became the head of our local Pioneer organization and later on even the head of the municipality's Pioneer headquarters. I was accepted to the Komsomol ahead of schedule, although I fought against it (it was not my fight against the system; I simply wanted to start anew in my new school). Today I think that my Pioneer experience showed me how the "wooden language" works: I came up with the best plans at school and always reported them as overfulfilled. I merely learned rapidly the correct choice and order of words; it is only honest to admit that today this quality has proven useful in the new project-world. In fact, we were not executing plans and fulfilling quotas, but listening to the Beatles, playing in the garden, fighting with snowballs, and running in the streets till late at night.*

So, briefly and honestly, my socialist childhood was more a happy one, than a communist one. I have grown up with Pippi Longstocking and Karlsson-on-the-Roof, with the Three Musketeers, The War of the Hedgehogs (a Bulgarian series), Nu, Pogodi! (a Soviet cartoon) and Pink Panther cartoons in the TV talk show Every Sunday on Bulgarian National Television. Even today it is easier for me to communicate with someone who has dreamed of being one of the characters in Blake's 7 or who has watched Star Wars at least a thousand times.

After 1989 our childhood suddenly disappeared as the 1980s disappeared from the narratives of communism; we were considered too young to remember. We became older gradually and the market discovered us again, this time as consumers, giving us our sweets and our 1980s movies. The public discourse was promptly flooded by one term: "nostalgia"; the old Bible myth gained new popularity—we will be free, then and only then, when the last born in slavery died. The recollections of the children of socialism are, perhaps, too nuanced for the new black-and-white ideological constructions, aren't they?

This text attempts to reconstruct the public repertoires of remembering communism mapped out in popular culture. Popular repertoires are the most widely accessible and therefore are most likely to be used by people as a means of re-thinking and constructing their own memories of the period. The analysis looks at several types of sources: firstly, the largest-circulation newspapers in Bulgaria: the *Trud* and *24 chasa* dailies and the even more popular weekly tabloids *Weekend*, *Show*, and *Shok*; secondly, advertisements and iconic images from popular culture; thirdly, online sources whose specific characteristics will be examined separately below.

Studies of memories of communism usually focus on another type of material: memoirs, diaries, articles in the serious press, as well as life history interviews with contemporaries. Focus on such sources, however, reconstructs a “privileged” memory. On the one hand, it interprets the memories of the elites; on the other, because of the subject of interest, life history interviews privilege the memories of a particular generation, who have lived longest under communism and have the most extensive memories of the period. This text attempts to go beyond such assumptions; it is not interested in the narratives of the elites, nor does it focus on the “richest” memories. On the contrary, it is focused on publicly available, completely open forms of remembering. The most popular repertoires are those materials from which people without specific resources can draw stories and images in order to narrate—in a way that may even displace the public repertoires—their personal memories and reconstruct their life stories. This study will not look at the private registers of memory, but at the public network of meanings constructed by remembering communism, because its true purpose is to trace how the meaningful framework of contemporary Bulgarian society is constructed, i.e., what the image of communism is at the level of everyday notions. Following Stuart Hall, we will analyze popular culture precisely as a form of expression of the familiar as a result of meaningful construction of everyday notions in a society. What popular culture allows us to see, are the repertoires through which some of the grand projects of a society have managed to take root in everyday life. It is important to limit the concept of “cultural repertoire.” It attempts to describe cultural forms as raw material that social actors use in order to meaningfully interpret their world and, more importantly, to be able to act in it. In this sense, cultural forms are the available public meanings that, in the course of their practice, social actors change, negotiate, and determine. In this text the publicly available forms of remembering communism are not constructed as being directly imposed on their users, but simply as a material from which people can assemble their own versions. Our effort is to describe the public map within which remembering occurs, and to interpret the public network of meanings that forms the framework of our individual memories.

This study focuses on the public forms of “cultural memory” in Marita Sturken’s sense:¹ it attempts to narrate, through the construction of “cultural memory,” a virtually political field that is an arena of power struggles and negotiations of legitimacy. Popular cultural forms can outline the forms of negotiation between the authorities and the public. By examining the construction of “cultural memory” as a form of political struggle, this text will also focus on the images and narratives of communism that are defined as nostalgic. This study

¹ Marita Sturken, “Memory, Consumerism and Media: Reflections on the Emergence of the Field,” *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 73–78.

ultimately seeks to explore whether postcommunist nostalgia is driven by something other than the simple desire to return to a past that is gone forever.

From the Victims of Communism to the Celebrities of Socialism

Before we proceed to analyze the popular cultural forms that evoke socialism, we will try to describe the historical context in which they began to appear. Immediately after the end of socialism the public narratives about it were strongly polarized and politicized, forming distinct “blue” (the color of the anti-communist opposition in Bulgaria) and “red” narratives of socialism. In the first years after 1989, the public sphere was dominated by “blue” memories and “red” histories, where the “blue” narrative focused on personal suffering and the “red” on collective progress.

Here it is appropriate to recall Sheila Fitzpatrick’s comment:

On the death of individuals, we usually follow the maxim of speaking nothing but good (“De mortuis nil nisi bonum”). The death of regimes, however, produces the opposite response. When a regime dies, observers take this as a proof of its inadequacy (“not fit to survive”), so the convention for speaking of recently deceased regimes is nothing but bad.²

At first communism was remembered primarily in terms of forced labor camps, victims, and repressions. Paradoxically, in parallel with their discourse about the victims of communism, the right-wing narratives about socialism were surprisingly egalitarian. Socialist society began to be narrated as an unjust and socially unequal society where privileges were distributed on the basis of party membership. One of the important demands of the opposition at the Round Table Talks held in January–May 1990 was the abolition of an unjust privilege—the residence permit system that restricted free access to the big cities and especially Sofia. (Interestingly, today online groups of “true Sofianites” are emerging in cyberspace, united by the idea of restoring the residence permit system in the capital; subsequently, Prime Minister Boiko Borissov, Bulgaria’s most popular politician, twice elected mayor of Sofia, mentioned this idea in his election campaign.) In parallel with criticizing socialism from egalitarianistic positions, the new free (private) media declared themselves advocates of “the people,” speaking the language of “the people” and reporting the news “the people” care about, according to a claim by *24 chasa*, the most popular daily at the time. The “red” narratives were mostly justificatory, their permanent refrain being “Todor Zhivkov built two Bulgarias.” They emphasized the modernization and

² Sheila Fitzpatrick, “The Soviet Union in the Twenty-first Century,” *Journal of European Studies* 37 (2007): 51–71.

industrialization of the country, somehow omitting to mention the repressive apparatus. Whenever the red and the blue narratives met, this literally led to public and private battles.

Popular culture at the beginning of the transition had its celebrities, mostly rock musicians; the “blue” protest songs of popular discontent were Western rock songs or their Bulgarian versions. The red rallies and demonstrations had a different repertoire of Bulgarian folk and pop songs evoking national themes. The patriotic pop song “Edna bŭlgarska roza” (A Bulgarian rose) is a trademark of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and its coalition partners to this day. On the margins of society, however, another popular culture, stigmatized as low and shameful, was rapidly increasing its fan base. It was extremely—and equally—popular among the emerging local “entrepreneurs” and “the people,” being the successor to the favorite “Serbian” music from the communist period. In 1990 the star of Serbian music Lepa Brena gave her first grandiose concert at the Vasil Levski National Stadium in Sofia, attracting a crowd of 100,000 people. Curiously, the transition did not call into question the cultural hierarchies constructed by communism. Serbian music and *chalga* were equally stigmatized as low, shameful, “Oriental.” At this early point of the transition, *chalga* did not yet have its own narrative about communism, but its popularity created powerful images of the present and the future as a consumer paradise that was rather gaudy and vulgar but was recognized by “the people.”

The beginning of the transition was dominated by narratives about the grand framework of the communist era, political or economic. The recent past became “communism,” and the present had to condemn it by law. The last installment in this chapter was passed in 2000 under the bombastic name “Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria.”

Remnants of the “political” memories are still evident today in the debate about the files of the communist secret police. These political narratives, however, are now elitist, not popular: the debate is alive mainly among the right-wing media and the hard cores of the right-wing parties. The continuing political debate about communism is occurring in a radically new context, in popular and consumer culture. Outside of the spotlight of public debate, the victims of communism are gradually being displaced by the celebrities of socialism.

The Birth of *Sotz*: Replicas and Relics

Immediately after 1989 all typical socialist goods disappeared from the market, while the products of socialist popular culture, including the so-called *estradni pesni* (lit. “stage” or “variety,” i.e., pop music) left the limelight. Even though the history of the present is most uncertain, the turn in popular culture can be tentatively dated around the year 2000. The main actors at the time were two

multinational companies: Coca-Cola and OMV. Coca-Cola launched a campaign under the slogan “40 years together.” The commercial presented Coca-Cola in the context of the last four decades, compressed to fashion, music, and leisure. It restored to the public eye socialist interiors, clothes, and famous pop songs: an emblematic song of the 1980s was back on television for the first time after 1989 and the twin singers, the Argirov Brothers, even became tabloid darlings for a short while. At the same time OMV launched an advertising campaign called “*sotz*-nostalgia” (*sotz* is a contracted form of “socialism” as pronounced in Bulgarian) in its petrol station shops. During the campaign OMV restaurants offered classic “socialist” dishes such as macaroni pudding. Coca-Cola even revived one of the local socialist “replicas”—the soft drink Etir, offered in the familiar old bottles with old labels deliberately stuck askew.

These flashbacks of socialism did not revive “desired” products but commonplace commodities of late socialism. The plain wafers (called “people’s wafer” today), a brand of *lyutenitsa* (tomato and pepper relish) with *khoro* chain dancers on the label, popularly known as “the *lyutenitsa* with the *khoro*,” and Krava chocolate all made a comeback. Kuma Lisa chocolate appeared on billboards all over Sofia under the slogan “A long-awaited return,” seemingly ending the list of reanimated socialist sweets. They came back not only with their old names, but also in their old packaging, slightly polished to keep the patina of memories intact. The market reinvented the childhood favorites of a whole generation.

Advertising campaigns that use images from the time of communism, reinventing it for everyday use, have become extremely popular. Sausages and frankfurters hold the lead. The story started with the “Ooo, Peppi!” commercial for Leki frankfurters. The nostalgic exclamation transported the female buyer and the male shop assistant to their youthful days and the shelves from the time of socialism, with a slight difference—the shelves were packed with foods and assorted meat products. The shop assistant’s words, “Ooo, Peppi!,” quickly became iconic, a catch phrase greeting even between strangers. Whether the commercial successfully sold the product is irrelevant. More important is that it triggered a volley of accusations that socialism was returning in a nostalgic, recycled form. The careful viewer will immediately see that the commercial is very ironic and deliberately plays upon nostalgia, not for communism but for youth. The context of many other advertising campaigns, however, intensified the feeling of a popular recycling of communism. *Narodni krenvirshi* (people’s frankfurters) were advertised through a “newsreel” about a cooperative farm featuring communist slogans, labor, comradeship, and abundance. The Vezhen sausages revived the stock-in-trade image of the *militционер* (socialist policeman) from classic Bulgarian films. The plotline is simple: young people having a noisy party and a vigilant neighbor calling “the people’s militia” to end the uproar. The young host offers the policeman a piece of sausage; it turns out he

is the son of a bigwig and the sausage is delicious. As the party continues, the neighbor and the policeman go down the stairs and talk about “Vezhen.” It is up to us to decide whether “Vezhen” is the bigwig or the delicious sausage. The commercial for Balkantourist *lukanka* (traditional flat sausage) spoofs a popular 1970s film (even the famous actor Slavcho Peev looks younger in it). Viewers will no doubt recognize him as the Communist Party secretary or enterprise manager, who must be served the best *lukanka* at a socialist-style banquet. A pop orchestra is playing light “cultured” music. The tag line of the commercial is: “Balkantourist! *Lukanka* for insiders.”

Interpreting these (and many other) commercials and advertisements as a nostalgic gesture seems insufficient. The market itself is reviving socialism as everyday experience and it is important to place this in the correct context. The process was initiated by multinational companies that are part of the global circulation of images and messages. If there is nostalgia, it is a global nostalgia for the 1950s and 1960s, for everyday life long gone. If we speak specifically of the images of *sotz*-nostalgia that have returned in all postsocialist countries since 2000, we must add broader explanations. Very often images of socialist everyday life are prompted by Western demands; they respond to the expectations of foreign users about local specifics. Images representing the totalitarian political system began to be produced immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall. The logic of market demand does not endlessly reproduce the same old thing but constantly invents new and interesting images. The narratives about communist terror were quickly exhausted and images of socialist everyday life began to be produced, in turn to run dry in less than a decade. The consumer images of nostalgia are largely produced under the pressure of the external gaze with the natural collaboration of the internal gaze. If we arrange the events in consumer culture in chronological order, we will see a meaningful coincidence: the birth of “economic nationalism,” and the transformation of the national into an image that sells well, coincide naturally with the “nostalgic” image of socialism. In this context, the remembering of communism can be narrated as a strategy for localizing foreign products and inventing “our own products.” “Peppi” paradoxically pairs with Khan Asparukh (an historical figure who founded the first Bulgarian empire in the seventh century) from the Danone yoghurt commercial, who brought yoghurt to the Bulgarian lands from across the steppes. This is an effort to reinvent the national, and by featuring communism as a local specificity, it becomes a local curiosity. Quite a few commercials and advertisements use historical references, but only those that use communist images are ironic. Communism seems the only period in Bulgarian history that is not regarded as sacred and may therefore be subject to irony, play, and jokes. As I noted earlier, the replicas of socialism restored the world of sweets to a whole generation; perhaps their irony visualized and legitimized the way this generation remembers communism. This hypothesis will be explored further in this text.

In her essay “On Practical Nostalgia,”³ Debora Battaglia argues that nostalgia is a practice of reinventing the present—in other words, that nostalgic representations do not create an image of the past but a gap in the present “in which alternative, cohabiting identities could become apparent.”⁴ To my mind, this is a productive framework for thinking about the popular images of socialism. When an era is obviously over (that is, when “nostalgic” representations of socialism began to be produced), reinventing it in images allows us to narrate ourselves as a coherent set of multiple alternative identities. The product—be it Coca-Cola, Balkantourist, or Leki—successfully represents a time continuum without interruption or reversal. These were the first narratives that mapped a repertoire legitimizing the possibility of constructing a coherent personal biography based on continuity without a sense of guilt.

This was how “socialist” products and images were reinvented, but another important story was the return of the relics of socialism in popular culture. The first issue of *Playboy* magazine published in Bulgaria had sexagenarian pop singer Lili Ivanova on its cover. The editor, Ivaylo Noisy Tsvetkov, declared Lili Ivanova the first Bulgarian pop star. Since then, golden oldies are back in fashion, appearing in popular TV shows and programs. The Bulgarian edition of *Music Idol* has been even advertised not only as a global show (and as such a mark of civilization), but also as an heir to a socialist talent search show *Trombata na Vili* (Vili’s horn). Several New Year’s television programs have again been directed by Khacho Boiadzhiev (the founder of the Bulgarian TV musical, as presented on the official site of Bulgarian National Television), drawing heavily on retrospective footage. There’s even a joke: “We’re expecting the return of the Russian Friday night film on TV” (Since 1965 Bulgarian TV has featured Central Soviet TV on Friday evening).

This return of *sotz* icons and images was not a sudden process. *Sotz* celebrities inconspicuously made their way back into the popular public sphere, ignored by researchers, political analysts and sociological surveys on account of being “yellow.” A closer look at the yellow press reveals how the past freely intertwines with the present. The regular tabloid columns and features are different, but *The Show* runs a section called “*Novini ot minaloto*” (News from the past); *Shok* features photo stories about past years under the headline “*Na tazi data*” (On this date); and *Weekend* throws in celebrities past and present into a close-knit motley. Since 2000, *chalga* music has become different, too. The initial sensuous liberation and joy of consumerism have been replaced by melancholic, lyrical motifs. A popular *chalga* song is called “Evala, Zhivkov” in reverence to Bulgaria’s long-time party leader and head of government Todor

³ Debora Battaglia, “On Practical Nostalgia: Self-Prospecting among Urban Trobrianders,” in *Rhetorics of Self-Making*, ed. idem (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995), 77–96.

⁴ Ibid., 93.

Zhivkov (1911–1998), whose deposition on 10 November 1989 heralded “the transition.” *Evala* is a vernacular word that translates roughly as “good for you,” “well done,” or “hats off.” Below is a literal translation of the first lines. The original is in rhymes:

Hats off to you, Zhivkov, hats off to you, Zhivkov,
We remember with pleasure
How we lived well on little [money]
In your time.

The chorus repeats *evala*, adding:

You were the best,
a great statesman
and a man of jest.

The refrain of a rap song shares this sentiment: “Before we even knew it, the good times were over.” The song has been posted by a number of users on Vbox7 and is available as a ringtone in different versions.

If until 2000 these were only alternative, underground, publicly illegitimate narratives of socialism, in 2006 they entered the official and well-guarded public sphere. 24 *chasa* celebrated the 10th of November with an article titled “*Ne-prekhodni v prekhoda*” (Intransient in the transition), devoted to ten things that have outlived socialism. The selection included the plain wafer, “the *lyutenitsa* with the *khoro*,” Lili Ivanova and the Stanishevs (at that time the prime minister was Sergei Stanishev, the leader of the Socialist Party and son of Dimităr Stanishev, secretary of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP). What happened was not the birth of nostalgia for communism but the birth of *soetz*, the period of the 1980s that the most active generations, now in their thirties and forties, remembered from childhood. The Kamchia sausages urge us to buy them not because they are tasty but because they have “the taste of our childhood.” If we recall the “replicas” of socialism, we will immediately reconstruct our childhood memories about the plain wafers, the brands of chocolate, Eskimo ice cream, the food in the school canteen. Not accidentally, popular culture is an active producer of “nostalgic” images; it creates repertoires for those who were children at the time. A careful look at the “replicas” and “relics” of *soetz*, at the commercials and advertisements that create images of communism, will detect a smack of irony, a nod and wink at that period, and, of course, a reassessment—the reassessment of a generation that older people say has no right to remember.

Remembering Communism Online

In Bulgaria access to the Internet and its use are distributed very unevenly. The typical Internet users are young people in big cities. Although Internet access is spreading fast and more and more people are interacting online, Web 2.0 is used primarily by young people. The youthful profile of Bulgarian cyberspace is an important characteristic, but should not be overestimated. According to Internet ratings, some of the most authoritative Bulgarian bloggers are not under 25; they are from the previous generation, people in their thirties and forties. Why is that important? Very often memories of communism are narrated precisely for young people who are unlikely to remember, because they were babies. These memories are narrated in a natural space for them—cyberspace—in a language that would tempt the users to read the narratives. Memories of communism are usually addressed to people who were young when the writer was young. The children of socialism have become legitimate witnesses of the period in order to narrate their different past. Online, we can analyze the public memories of the generation that greatly shapes our present.

Another very important feature of Bulgarian cyberspace is its political orientation. During the parliamentary elections in 2009 all online media polled their readers and the online vote turned out significantly different from the actual one. In cyberspace, there were two greatly overrated political players: the right-wing Blue Coalition and the Greens, a formation created on the eve of the elections with a self-defined right-wing political platform. By contrast, the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP) looked like a small party that might fail to enter parliament. The largest number of bloggers took part in the campaign of the Blue Coalition, while the Greens were the most active in promoting their causes online. Bulgarian cyberspace clearly defines itself as right-wing and one could expect that online memories will recall the right-wing narrative from the beginning of the transition. Surprisingly, forced labor camps and the victims and crimes of communism are lost among a myriad of Chavdar and Pioneer children (see the explanation in Hranova's paper or in the vocabulary), *estrada* (pop music), and a hodgepodge of other things. Cyberspace is a whole new world where there is everything. This text is limited to social network websites, whose content is produced by their users. Websites specifically designed as "memory-work" are the focus of attention here because they are based on the activity of users and function as relatively open platforms; I will call them platform websites. These websites initiated the remembering of communism online. In their "About Us" sections, platform websites declare their ideological positions, tempting the researcher to explore two important avenues: on the one hand, to what extent the framework determines the focus of memories, and, on the other, how personal accounts bracket and shift this framework. In other words, open platforms are interesting as a space for negotiating memories. Another issue

illuminated by social networks is how specific communities are constructed through memories; social networks allow us to analyze remembering as a tool for community construction. And a last self-imposed limit: this text will not deal with Facebook causes and groups or event-based causes with rallying slogans along the lines of “Communism never again!” It looks only at websites focusing on remembering and explores the process of remembering, not the way memories and narratives about the past are practiced politically in support of various topical causes—an interesting, but separate study in its own right.

Finally, the Internet allows us to interpret the most personal public repertoires of memory. Essentially a hybrid public–private space, the Internet enables us to see how personal memories become public narratives open to commentary, displacement, and usage. Most importantly, it enables us to trace how the framework of collective memory is negotiated publicly to construct collective identities.

The Inventory of *Sotz*

To my knowledge, the first website designed as “memory-work” was *I Lived Socialism* (*Az zhiviakh sotsializma*). Not only was it the first of its kind; it was initiated by popular public figures and transcended cyberspace to become an actual book. For all these reasons, it triggered a debate and attracted the most attention offline. The idea to launch the project was born in 2004. It was entirely web-based, using this medium as a possibility for discursive remembering of the past. The website began operating in June 2005, publishing three new stories a week. Currently, there are 200 stories on the website, 350 entries, and 171 stories published in a book. The oldest storyteller is eighty-one years old and the youngest one is twenty. The website relies on memories generated by users, but the content is subedited by a professional writer. The stories are eloquent, but this is not the point. Interestingly, the first website that attempted to open cyberspace to memories created an expectation that the storytelling would be professionalized. Anyone can remember, but it takes a professional writer to rework the raw memories into a story, acting as a mediator between remembering and its narration. Why do I stress this? Because it strikes an odd cord when you consider the ideology of the website:

We believe our society needs not simply a frank debate on socialism but something more—it needs a space for normal communication wherein every experienced story about socialism can be shared.

With this website, we want to encourage such sharing and speaking, and include new, unknown voices in the narratives about the past.

We believe the totalitarian past as personal experience remains unprocessed, appearing only in separate conflicting narratives.

This is the first platform website with a clearly declared position that tries to involve “ordinary people” in the game of remembering—albeit with the mediation of a professional storyteller. This may be the mediator’s signature, but the narratives are similar; in reality, they are not contradictory and have been processed, and to what extent they are “true,” or are gradually turning into a literary project, is an open question. More interesting is the conflict between the wish to hear unknown voices and the reluctance to hear them in their “authentic” form. The second most important thing in the website’s manifesto is the reference to our “totalitarian” past, immediately marking it as a right-wing project. The initial recruitment of popular people to give an impetus to the remembering process additionally reinforced its right-wing nature. Ironically, rightists have strongly criticized the project, accusing it of normalizing a “monstrous” past. Interpreting it is so difficult that leftists have likewise criticized it for reducing socialism to the long queues for bananas.⁵ In my interpretation, this website successfully upholds the ideology about everyday life under totalitarianism, narrating memories about the “banality of evil.” However, it constructed “totalitarian everyday life” through rewriting and moderation, through selection, not recollection.

In 2006 the website’s initiator, the prominent writer Georgi Gospodinov, published *Inventarna kniga na sotsializma* (An inventory book of socialism) in collaboration with Yana Genova. An instant bestseller, the book is a catalogue of objects from everyday life during socialism, from ideologically charged objects to mundane items. The introduction explains the biographical need for this publication, but refuses to interpret the material. Based on the actual selection of objects, the book’s thesis is that ideology permeated everything; its influence could be felt even in gym shoes. As the thesis is only implied, the book remains open to interpretation. It can serve simply as “Proust’s madeleine,” triggering a chain of personal memories, or as a testimony to a “sad,” “grey” everyday life. Thanks to these two projects, in 2006 the public sphere opened up to personal memories and accounts, and found they were not about communism but about private everyday life under socialism.

A website called 1968 was launched in 2008 to commemorate the anniversary of an event that never happened in Bulgaria. A heated public debate about 1968, however, did not take place there. The website recounts in detail two events: the Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact intervention in the summer, and the World Festival of Youth and Students held in Bulgaria the same year. It collects miscellaneous documents related to these two events, seemingly trying to construct an online archive about 1968 and a documentary website using the possibilities of the Internet. This is the theory. In practice, slogans of the Prague

⁵ See Boris Popivanov, “Sotsializmît na bananite” (Socialism of the bananas), *Kultura*, 23 March 2006.

Spring are juxtaposed with headlines from *Rabotnichesko delo*, the organ of the BCP; photos of protesting citizens are contrasted with photos of *nomenklatura* officials; photos of the barricades in Prague are set against photos of festively decorated Sofia hosting the World Youth Festival and its grand opening ceremony. Essentially, the website seems to make a statement: against revolt and liberation in Prague, Bulgaria slumbered in the grey limbo of socialism. Was it because the regime in Bulgaria was more brutal and oppressive? There are no such hints on the website, although certain documents—some of the few reproduced in the traditional media—show how the Communist Party went out of its way to prevent the Beatles from coming to Bulgaria for the festival. The question remains open: nothing happened in Bulgaria because the regime took tough measures or because a revolt in Bulgaria would have been difficult to happen in principle?

Bulgaria is represented through official, not subversive images. The website is organized around historical-political events that are patently absent from personal memories. A special section on memories shows how memories situated within the context of documents function as testimonials of political events. Several postings insist they are eyewitness accounts; other contributors admit they want to share their memories about these events; others use the key events on the website to date their memories and contextualize their narratives through their views at the time. Oddly, the collected memories call into question the framework of the website. There are only thirty-seven entries, a negligible number against the general outburst of online activity; but they all recount informal events, adding a lively, diverse coloring to Bulgaria's static and official image. Several postings describe in detail the events at the University of Sofia History Department in 1968, citing the subversive slogans and leaflets disseminated by several students to show there was resistance in Bulgaria, too.

Again, the website is openly "right-wing": one of the project's authors is Naio Titsin, PR chief of Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria, one of the two main parties in the right-wing Blue Coalition. Most of the memories describe a sense of shame at the time or a retrospective feeling of guilt, and all claim that people knew little about the situation. The personal slant of the narratives is most intriguing. Along with the declared sense of shame, a conscript in the summer of 1968 recounts his personal suffering while he was on duty; another soldier remembers how his unit's cooks were sent to Czechoslovakia and painstakingly describes how the soldiers had to cook their own meals.

The memories about the festival are similarly fractured. An anecdotal story begins with a description of fear and terror, beguiling the reader to presume that the author was in Prague during the occupation. It turns out to be a man's childhood account describing his mother's fear of the foreigners, who will invade her home town and most probably scare her child. "This was the first time I saw a black person" is a recurrent statement, with a vivid recollection how a group of

“blacks” happily walked around the streets of Sofia chanting “Levski for life!” (Levski is one of the top two soccer clubs in Bulgaria). Other topics include the anticipation of the Beatles, the live rock concerts and how difficult it was to obtain records of Western music with photos of popular bands from the period. The memories narrate 1968 as the year in which something important happened in Bulgaria: not a revolt but a change that opened whole new worlds and transformed everyday life forever. Another dominant theme in the realm of memory is: “We were not closed and isolated.” The memories construct the forced insulation of Bulgarian society by the regime and the emerging thousands of everyday tactics to “open up” by listening to the BBC and the Beatles. These are narratives about small rebellions that hold together personal biographies to this day. One recollection says:

These moments, when we worshipped Paul McCartney, were in love with the Beatles and envied those who had access to everything connected with them, are very important to me. Because I now realize that despite everything, they didn’t completely break and intimidate us. As they say today, we weren’t so dense and uncool.

The right-wing platform websites reconstruct the memory of socialism as everyday life involving constant tactics of transgressing the limits imposed by the regime. The reconstruction of the period as a battle for keeping one’s personal dignity as understood today is very interesting with regard to the remembering process. People seem to narrate the victories of their everyday tactics, but very rarely their defeats. Memories seem to reconstruct communism as “everyday heroism,” an epic of “everyday values,” to borrow Tsvetan Todorov’s term. In their narratives people give themselves continuity; I would rather define what the ideologues of decommunization and criminalization of communism call “normalization” as memory-work seeking to normalize less the past than the present. It feeds what Bourdieu terms the biographical illusion—through these narratives one can construct one’s identity and acquire/keep one’s dignity today. We should bear in mind this is only one of the forms of remembering socialism.

Dictionary of a Bright Childhood

If platform websites are usually project-based and the invitation for remembering communism comes from the outside, the movement in social networks is entirely different. Users construct a community and participate in a website not because someone has offered them space and has invited or tempted them to narrate their memories, but because they want to share their memories. In social networks we can trace how remembering communism turns into an effort to construct a coherent identity and maintain a community.

The most popular website based on remembering communism is called *Nasheto detstvo* (Our childhood). It is a classic social network with 794 registered users and constitutes an archive-in-the-making on communism. One can find everything, from photos of slogans to string shopping bags. Memories are divided in different sections: “My Town,” “Family,” “School,” “Leisure Time,” “Our Books.” Users seem to have concentrated around the effort of reconstructing, at least virtually, every piece of their everyday life during childhood. Their work to compile an archive of communism is truly collective: very often one user continues the memory of another to supplement or flesh out the narrative. This is how urban landscapes and consumer items like the long gone and forgotten Sen-Sen candies are reconstructed. The network is so active that it is worth trying to understand what drives this archive-compiling effort; do users truly miss communism?

We will find a clue for our interpretation in an informative section called *Rechnik na svetloto detstvo* (A dictionary of bright childhood), in compilation since February 2008. According to the website, the purpose of the dictionary is: “to offer an interpretation of terms and phrases from our childhood that are no longer in use today. Every explanation reflects our perception as children at the time.” As a true dictionary, it is arranged alphabetically, but includes entries like *agit-tablo* (agitation board) and the Serbian actor Gojko Mitić, famous for his film portrayals of noble Indian braves. This is the explanation for *sploten kolektiv* (tight-knit collective):

Polysemous term. According to the Pioneer children’s leader, your collective is tight-knit if no one is absent from the Pioneer children’s assembly. You think that you are tight-knit if you don’t tell your form teacher who broke the glass of the display case in the classroom.

The ceremonious *chestna pionerska* (upon my Pioneer word) has become “An oath of last resort to prove to the neighbor you had nothing to do with his broken window. Unfortunately, the rubber loop of your telltale sling is hanging from your pocket.”

We can end with the definition of *vsestranno razvita lichnost* (all-round personality):

What grown-ups want to turn you into eventually, but have got their plans wrong, because you’ve decided to be a pirate, or if you are a girl, a pop singer, or an astronaut traveling between Sofia and the Andromeda Nebula. Let the bookworms become all-round personalities, that’s all they want anyway.

The website recalls children’s typical displacement practices in the 1980s. It does not seek to narrate the ideological framework of the period but the meaning that children inscribed into the “wooden language.” The memories subvert the monolithic image of communism, transforming it into a shared everyday reality. The closed system and the slower historical flow of time as compared

with the present day combined in this period to construct the last common life experience. That is why it continues to be remembered and negotiated through memories as a framework of collective identity.

An innocuous poll asking users about their favorite children's books highlights another important aspect. The amazing consistency of the titles also shows a strong prevalence of West European books over Bulgarian and Russian books. Pippi Longstocking is by far the most favorite character, while Mitko Palauzov, the youngest antifascist partisan fighter who was killed at the age of thirteen, has sunk into oblivion. Books about partisans were on the mandatory reading list, but now the grown-up children refuse to include them with the books that shaped their worldview. We are witnessing the transformation of communism into something different; the website recalls the everyday life experience and categorically refuses to forget and condemn it. It maps out repertoires through which we can coherently assemble ourselves and narrate our personal experience without breakdowns and interruptions. Today the children of socialism narrate themselves through the everyday history of the 1980s and offer an alternative reading of what communism was and how we laughed at it. The memories on this website picture a diverse everyday life, quite difficult to define as communist, especially if no one is trying to define it along these lines. Everyone narrates a past experience that is the defining feature of a generation, a bond that has successfully formed a community. Socialism proves to be simply the experience of a generation that is not ready to renounce it.

My Memories of Communism

If websites like *Nasheto detsvo* and *BG mama* are efforts to construct social networks and collective communities that use remembering communism as a collective resource, blogs are a completely different matter. Often the product of networks (blogrolls describe precisely such networks), they are nevertheless an individual effort; they are the most personal yet public form of remembering communism. This form maps repertoires of the personal narrative instead of repertoires for constructing collective experience.

An amazing array of blogs features special postings about memories of communism. They often make cross-references, with postings responding to other postings. Childhood memories are again the norm: almost every blogger notes how many years he or she has lived under communism, and the conspicuous common experience is that of the Pioneer child.

A good starting point is the blog "*Kako Siike, ne sâm ot tiahk!*" (I'm not like that, Aunt Siyka!). The title is the famous opening line from a classic short story by Bulgarian writer Chudomir; the narrator claims she's not the sort to gossip and indulgently does exactly that. The blog has been rated several times as the

most popular Bulgarian blog. The blogger, Longanlon, is in his thirties or forties and openly declares his right-wing or even libertarian views. His posting "*Spomenite mi ot komunizma*" (My memories of communism) has provoked eighty comments and has been reproduced on three other blogs keeping the debate. The posting is a collection of memories packed with Pioneer and Chavdar children; the short conclusion is that "seen through my childish eyes, life under communism wasn't at all bad."

The resulting eighty comments are a live discussion and a gold mine for memory-seekers. The theme has provoked stories about the Pioneer organization, recollection of the young Chavdar child's envy for the red scarf worn by older Pioneers, the Palace of Pioneer Children, and so forth. Most of the memories are nostalgic, and some openly leftist postings reinterpret socialism as an era of social gains. Given the specific right-wing character of Bulgarian cyberspace, a claim about social gains is inevitably followed by dramatic memories and liberal critique of socialism. Nostalgic memories, however, come from the author's generation, people in their thirties and forties. Postings by older people are much more critical of communism, pointing out that nostalgia is the effect of childhood. The important observation is that a personal public space like blogs has inspired a debate missing from the traditional media and the traditional public sphere. Oddly enough, the "right-wing blogger" ventures to make "revisionist" statements about socialism. It appears the Internet has sparked a debate in the attempt to recall socialism and add new, generationally different memories. Communism is becoming a space of everyday practices, an era of modern everyday life beyond ideology, an experience that can serve us today. If a superficial gaze may be inclined to see nostalgia in the memories about the red scarf, a different interpretation may prove to be more adequate in an attempt at narrating how we have turned from Pioneer children into liberals because, or in spite of, our Pioneer childhood. This nostalgia is for a peaceful childhood, and it would be unfair to deny it today. Having the children of socialism narrate their memories has become legitimate for the first time in cyberspace, and socialism looks different because it appears with the images of the 1980s. The creation of public repertoires of memory by a new generation makes possible a comprehensive, different understanding of communism and opens the doorway for interpretation of the period as a life experience that should be understood through its displacements, deficits, and positive aspects.

Nostalgia as Radical Critique

We began this text with an analysis of the popular repertoires of remembering communism and end it with the memories of a particular generation, the children of communism. We spoke above all about memories that would be marked

by the external gaze as “nostalgia.” They represent communism not through repression and the big political framework, but as a time of security, social gains, and peaceful life. Nostalgia is not a value-neutral concept; on the contrary, it masks a malady: severe homesickness or acute longing for past times. This is how it was constructed in modern medical discourse in the nineteenth century, seeping later on into the social sciences. In 2001 Svetlana Boym published her seminal book *The Future of Nostalgia*, employing this medicalized discourse to interpret contemporary nostalgia as “abdication of personal responsibility, a guilt-free homecoming, an ethical and aesthetical failure.”⁶ Many researchers, public speakers, and sociological agencies use this term to refer to the positive narratives about socialism emerging since 2000. “One in Four Bulgarians Nostalgic for Socialism” is a telling headline from the daily newspaper *Sega*. Such feelings identified as nostalgia are met with public condemnation and indignation. Nostalgia for socialism has begun to be described not as a strategy of memory, but as a form of oblivion; the columns of Georgi Gospodinov and Boiko Penchev in the daily newspaper *Dnevnik* are representative examples. International foundations are supporting projects that will tell the true history of communism in order to defeat the nostalgic return to the past.

No one pays attention to the functions of these nostalgic representations and the significant difference between memories and evaluation. If by describing the images we tried to narrate their functions, we would come to the evaluation of communism. A quote from Longanlon can help us once again. His story triggered postings that vehemently condemn communism in the context of nostalgia. Longanlon was compelled to react: “Of course, it’s a dirty thing [“it” being a reference to communism from a previous posting]. Freedom is man’s greatest invention ever, while communism deprives people of freedom.” Regardless of this turn, he refused to rewrite his positive memories: “Of course, I, too, have nothing good to say about those who pine for the system (are there still people like that?), but to say that there was nothing good is a bit of an overstatement.”

Even if we quote no more, these statements are representative of the generation’s overall memory. It remembers its childhood as a happy childhood, a set of opportunities today’s children do not have. At the same time, it was a time of shortages, of longing for blue jeans and Western music, and this generation does not want to obliterate any facets of its memories. The power cuts, the queues for scarce goods, playing in the neighborhood have all marked this generation. It feels secure enough to accept communism as part of its personal history, interpret it in the present, remember it through the joy of childhood, simultaneously evaluating it as “deprivation of freedom,” and use it as a critique of present-day realities.

⁶ Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), xiv.

The so-called “nostalgic memories” open a new field of interpretation. They are the first public repertoire that allows us not to cross out our past but to interpret it effectively for our present. They are the opposite of nostalgia in the medicalized discourse; they are not an attempt at reviving but actively reworking the past. Instead of stigmatizing the present, the past can provide positive resources for our future to the extent that it constructs images of a possible different life.

Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley have revised the concept of “nostalgia” in a way that looks extremely productive in interpreting the memory of communism. They propose distinguishing the desire to return from the other meaning of nostalgia as a way “to recognize aspects of the past as the basis for renewal and satisfaction in the future.”⁷ Nostalgia can function as utopia, maintaining the continuity of time.

If we return to the beginning of this text, we will see that we described public memories as a form of political struggle. What do the “nostalgic” memories of communism tell us? They are set against the background of constantly growing discontent with “the transition” and citizens’ refusal to participate in politics to help formulate and build a collective future. We can understand the nostalgic narrative as a form of radical critique whose purpose is not to reconstruct the past, but to construct publicly legitimate alternatives to the present. For me, the critical potential of the nostalgic narrative seems extremely important, because it narrates the dream for a better society. It may be far-fetched to call it communist, but we can safely define it as a modern society of solidarity. Nostalgia is a form of escaping from the cultural hegemony of the present, a possibility for utopia and a collective project at a time that has relinquished the utopian horizon.

⁷ Michael Pickering and Emily Keightley, “The Modalities of Nostalgia,” *Current Sociology* 54 (2006): 923.

8. Daily Life and Constraints in Communist Romania in the Late 1980s: From the Semiotics of Food to the Semiotics of Power

Smaranda Vultur

In 1974, when my daughter was born, I lived in Bucharest and soon I was to discover that basic food products that had not been a problem so far were becoming few and far between, being available only at the cost of endless queues. I could not predict, then, that things would get much worse, to such an extent that, between 1987 and 1989, when I was back in Timișoara, sugar, butter, oil, and flour were rationed, while milk, eggs, and meat implied the same endless queues, before they would disappear altogether from Romanian stores. Consequently, I experienced the notions evoked in my study directly, and the measures taken by the people I interviewed coincided with my own. The position of analyzing someone else's memory and relating it to my own was a new challenge for me. After all, for the past sixteen years, I had studied the memory of those who had experienced the horrors of Stalinist communism, which I myself had been fortunate enough not to remember.

With hindsight, the time and energy wasted during the 1980s to obtain products for the most basic human needs, as well as the other hardships that left an indelible mark on my youth (the lack of central heating, the prohibition of abortions, the unavailability of contraceptive means, Ceaușescu's megalomania, the absurdity of daily life, the lies, the double language, the limitation or deprivation of freedom, the imposition of silence, the threats, the fear), seemed to be less than what my parents' and grandparents' generations had experienced, but my dissatisfaction and anger were no less profound.

At the same time, I cannot share the attitudes of the younger generations, who refer to this theme and period with amusement or irony. To me, they seem to belittle the evil of that time, to dismiss as derisive the things that literally ruined my life. Little by little, I started analyzing the mechanisms used by the regime to subject and control us, to transform us into their tools, leaving little room for personal choice. Sometimes these mechanisms were crude, but often I would stumble upon them unawares, finding them in the humblest gestures of

everyday life. I found that analysis was a way of taking a distance and, sometimes, reaching healing, making the gap between experience and perception more intelligible and justifiable.

When discussing the way we remember the recent past as part of our life's history, our "subject" should not be approached only in the formal manner of the scholarly discourse. I accordingly put forward two possible introductions, feeling that each of them is a possible approach: one opening the way for reflection and analysis, the other one dedicated to recollection as such. The challenge is to bring these two paths together. This is, I believe, the task of anthropology, which has to adjust its methods in order to achieve the right balance between a distanced glance and subjective involvement. At the same time, the role of the anthropologist is one between an actor and a scriptwriter of the past, so that she can bring competing memories into dialogue, in order not to destroy the emergence of multiple meanings by abrupt reductions.

The Overall Approach

First Possible Introduction

Are food and eating habits in the 1980s a good topic to discuss daily life and the way the communist state controlled the individual and society? Can we look more closely at the way in which we remember those things? I will try to answer this question in the affirmative, but no matter where we may start probing into life during Ceaușescu's regime, we cannot avoid a few general questions if we want to grasp the essential characteristics of this period.

One basic question refers to the particular phase of Romanian communism; another one is related to the types of interacting discourses of remembering: what does it take to recover individual facts, as well as the image of the "epoch"? In this particular case we are dealing with a period we have fully experienced ourselves, so our own memories interfere, triggered by the testimonies we are going to quote, which renders the effort of objective research even more difficult. The interplay between subjectivity and objectivity, between memory and analysis, brings out the emotional currents that accompany and sometimes shape our own memory and forgetfulness. It permeates the context in which the remembered facts are placed and the multitude of meanings attributed to them (in a more extended narrative, such as a life story, a letter, a memoir or an interview), or the way in which we select the tense of the recollection, as subjects who remember ourselves or listen to/read about other people's memories in relation to the present tense when the act of communicating and sharing the experience takes place (the context of the communication).

To these variables we may add those pertaining to the general rules of the text that shape a particular memory, or the unpredictable oscillation of information between the oral and the written register producing discursive mixtures between the personal memory (the testimony) and what has already been written or said (repeatedly) about certain facts or events. Together they transform the discursive production of the past into an attempt to juxtapose various opinions, involving implicit strategies to persuade the interlocutor or the public. Thus we find ourselves amidst actions with various, often contradictory or paradoxical outcomes despite the apparent or conspicuous neutrality of the narratives or the analyses. The background of these interactions is a society in which the attitude toward the communist past, as revealed by the various memory narratives, is not homogeneous and has a polemical stance against competing discourses.

Memory is a sensitive subject in today's Romanian society as many political or ideological issues tend to be transferred to it. It can be used as a pretext for direct confrontation or simply as a means of expression. Memory thus causes discomforting moments of debate and sometimes heated dispute in a society accustomed to living its relationship with the past according to two main paradigms: a potentially heroic, emblematic one, devoid of "small facts" or "insignificant details" that are dismissed in order to promote a positive global perception, and a commemorating, ceremonial one, meant to reiterate periodically a history "frozen" in an unquestionable image of pious worship far from any critical assessment.

This chapter is based on the following sources: oral confessions from the Oral History and Cultural Anthropology Group Archive at the Third Europe Foundation¹ (the result of various research programs on memory under my direction), interviews conducted by myself on numerous occasions or with a special focus on this theme, oral or written confessions, memoirs published in books about the memory of the communist past in the 1980s, letters received from friends during that period, electronic or oral surveys of acquaintances (asked about a topic they would choose to talk about if the theme were the 1970s and the 1980s), informal conversations and, of course, my own memories. Some of the research material also comes from previous testimonies that have appeared in other research papers.

¹ Arhiva de Istorie Orală a Fundației "A treia Europă" (AIOFTE). From this archive the interviews I quoted in this paper are: L. C. and C. C., b. 1935 in Timișoara—interviewed by Smaranda Vultur in 2007, București; M. R., b. 1925 in Timișoara—interviewed by Smaranda Vultur in 2007, Timișoara; I. C., b. 1935 in Timișoara—interviewed by Adrian Onica in 2004, Timișoara; S. S., b. 1938—interviewed by Simona Adam in 2005; M.-J. B., b. 1958 in Timișoara—interviewed by Simona Adam in 2005; A. R., b. 1954—interviewed by Simona Adam in 2004, Timișoara; A. S., b. 1921—interviewed by Roxana Onica in 2004, Brăila; S. D., b. 1925—interviewed by Roxana Onica in 2004, Brăila; G. B., b. 1950—interviewed by Roxana Onica in 2004, Brăila.

The theme of food appears in all these testimonies in various forms: as an *image of deprivation*: what was missing or was (occasionally) available in the shops; as a *constant preoccupation of daily life*: specific practices related to obtaining food (standing in line, absurd savings), solutions for dealing with limited food supplies, as well as new types of social relations and mentalities (some still persistent today); as an opportunity to explore *social differences and power relations*, often measured in terms of one's access to various supplies (which sometimes also included the distribution of supplies); as a definition of a *time of limitations and gaps*; as an opportunity to identify the *forms of coercion and control* exerted upon the individual. These general areas indicate a number of research possibilities.

Second Possible Introduction: The Turning Point of the Revolution

On 20 December 1989, from the balcony of today's District Council building—then the headquarters of the Romanian Communist Party—some of the strikers who had broken into the building sang “Long live free Romania!” and started to give short speeches against the communist leadership interspersed with all sorts of claims. Among the first claims I heard was that of a woman asking for bananas and chocolate for the children (I was one of the numerous witnesses of this event, standing in the middle of the crowd that had gathered outside the building on that memorable winter afternoon when the inhabitants of Timișoara really believed that Ceaușescu “had fallen” as a result of their revolution and the sacrifice of human lives). “We want bananas and chocolate for our children!” or “We want food for our children!” were some of the slogans of the Timișoara Revolution along with other, less original but no less specific demands such as: “We want bread!” There were civic demands as well: “We want free elections!”

On the evening of 17 December 1989, after the first victims had been shot and the wounded were carried to the District Hospital in the trunks of private cars, on the route of this “cargo”—frightening and shocking for all of its witnesses who found it hard to believe that such atrocities were possible—a trolley full of apples appeared at a street corner (as if) out of nowhere. In a few minutes people were already standing in line behind it, hesitantly and unassumingly as a result of inertia. On the following day, when many families were mourning their dead or wounded, some shops started to sell lemons (citrus fruits were a luxury) and many people queued for the desired fruit in time for Christmas and the New Year. Were these desperate measures taken by the authorities in order to negotiate a compromise with the population,² an attempt to minimize the seriousness

² The same approach was used by Ceaușescu in Bucharest on 21 December, when he promised a raise while he demanded that the crowd gathered in front of the Central Committee of the Romanian Communist Party “should stand still.”

of the situation (to suggest a “normality,” which according to a strategy that had worked in the past, would play down the violence used by the authorities against the population between 16–19 December)? It is hard to tell.

Witnesses of the events that took place in front of the Timișoara Opera House, that was to become a symbol of the Revolution, remember that the biggest shop in the city centre, Unic, was deserted for days, its windows smashed, without anyone trying to break in or touch its shelves where the only available product was a pathetic handful of spinach cans. The patriotic guards who on 21 December were sent to Timișoara by train from Craiova under the pretext that the city was besieged by the Hungarians, but in reality summoned to fight back the strikers who refused to leave the square between the Orthodox Cathedral and the Opera House, were welcomed and overpowered by the “enemy” with bread and salami (Timișoara had the famous slaughterhouse of Comtim, which I will refer to later on).

Apparently, food enjoyed special attention from the beginning of the anti-communist movement in circumstances that would normally seem to have no relation to it whatsoever. Its special role at a time when the city was practically under siege and the outcome of the events was totally unpredictable, is a clear proof that the concern for food and eating had become a real obsession as food shortages were becoming more and more acute. We cannot ignore, however, the more general cultural aspects that will be dealt with more closely in my attempt to complete and clarify the picture briefly sketched in this introduction.

I will emphasize two aspects. The first deals with presenting Romanian communism as a time period that finished in 1989 (although this statement is debatable). Most of the people who remember communism regard 1989 as a turning point. According to this view, the entire history of the regime is regarded as a series of turning points (a commonplace in the memorial discourse). The 1980s have a clearly defined place in this frequently interrupted continuum. The second aspect is that our memory works as a series of questions we are trying to answer as we remember, looking for coherence in a world that is for many—especially in the realm of food and eating habits—grotesque, kitsch, absurd, a spectacle that has just finished, a show we are more prepared to discuss in general terms than to investigate in detail. The autobiographical narrative that the narrator’s intentions and talent may turn into an insightful commentary, is the function of diverging degrees of distance from the facts that are being considered and assessed.

Food and Eating, or Timing Romanian Communism

Are there more ways to talk about the different periods of communism? One is the discourse of overgeneralizations (gloomy period, murderous regime) that often engenders a global negative perception of things. Speaking of the 1950s

and the 1960s, L. C. says: “The sky was lead-like. There was a gloomy atmosphere.” Referring to the 1980s, M.-J. B. talks about “the fog we were groping through, both at work and in the streets,” a sordid landscape, an oppressive “grey,” both real and symbolic, tending to invade everything, human beings and objects, moods, feelings, and looks.

The city [Timișoara in the 1980s] was grey and dull, there were no street lights. For me at least, symbolically, the desert outside reflected the desert inside, and everything was exacerbated in those years when there was no light, no decent life, no hot running water, no way you could stay clean, no way you could eat healthily... It looked as if people’s faces had also turned grey. Perhaps I was feeling this more intensely, but I think my fellow citizens, especially my friends—I can talk about them because we spoke with each other—felt the same. (A. R.)³

Placed under careful scrutiny or perceived from a bird’s eye view (as most testimonies vacillate between these two tendencies), the communist world of the 1980s makes food an emblematic topic for this age of extreme depredation. Writing about the lines he used to stand in as a teenager writer Paul Cernat looks at the people around him from the same dysphoric angle:

The people were ugly, stinking, deformed, brutish, frustrated, scornful, monstrously envious, and some of them would have gladly collaborated with the secret police in order to get some extra meat or only because their fellows they wanted to betray were a little “different.” I have never seen uglier, more degraded people than in those queues: they grew stale and went off just like the food they were queuing for. “They never have enough, the worms,” Elena Ceaușescu, the world-famous scholar, would have put it. The dominating, overwhelming impression was that of a concentration camp in the open air.⁴

Asked during an interview I conducted in 2007 about the moment when they realized Ceaușescu’s regime had started to get worse, L. C. and his wife C. C. mentioned the early 1980s when food supplies got scarcer, the queues became more numerous and surveillance got stricter:

L. C.: I know it started with the economy in 1981.

C. C.: It started with the economy and the secret police grew more active too. They would find out about our gossip, about the conversations people had while queuing. We realized they were questioning everybody who had a chat while queuing for food.

S. V.: What are the other emblematic aspects of Ceaușescu’s period?

L. C.: The queues. I got specialized in queuing for milk, the other queues were for my wife. I would queue for milk at 5 a.m., even earlier.

³ All the fragments of oral history interviews have been translated from Romanian by Dana Chetrescu Percec. I thank her.

⁴ Paul Cernat, “Cozi și oameni de rând în anii ’80,” in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 195.

Scarce food supplies and the survival strategies this entailed are often spontaneously associated in people's minds with communism. In a series of identical interviews I conducted (under a project targeted mainly at women but also involving men as part of its comparative approach)⁵ one of the closing questions after dealing with more concrete topics was: *What is your opinion about the communist period?* Many answers avoid such a globalizing view and offer concrete examples or arguments supporting a negative opinion about communism. Food was one of the first topics brought up in these interviews:

We had a truly hand-to-mouth existence back then. We used to freeze queuing up for an egg, we would wake up before dawn to get it. We used to get six or seven eggs only before Easter. I had some connections who worked in a grocery store so I could buy some sugar and flour in exchange for a Bible. (A. S.)

During the communist period, we all had access to very small amounts of food, we were totally unassuming, we didn't complain, we would stand in huge lines to get a bag of chicken bones. My husband was forced to do volunteer agricultural work, not very often, though, because he worked for the railway company and he was needed there. (S. D.)

We were frustrated because we had no food and there was no place where we could find it. We couldn't feed our children properly because we could only take eggs against a certain number of points.⁶ It was the same for bread and even if you got points for meat, it took days before you had access to some bones and lard that you could cook. There was nothing you could buy back then. Sometimes, if you had connections, you would pay through the nose for some food, for some meat. (G. B.)

This was a quasi-general situation but, despite this specific trait of the 1980s in Romania, food has an essential place in the Romanian mentality. The local culture, particularly in the Banat region, associates food with wealth, with emotional communication in the family, with socializing. Cooking traditions form part of the national memory and their interruption could cause genuine identity crises. Saving food supplies was a survival strategy in the 1980 when no one knew whether or when they would find what they need; deep freezers, which were very popular in those days, could be rarely found in shops and were purchased only in secret. The attempt to deprive people of food was a basic characteristic of Ceaușescu's regime and was immediately considered the worst possible repressive measure. In the Banat meat⁷—especially pork and the products

⁵ The 2003 project run by the Oral History and Cultural Anthropology Group of the Third Europe Foundation was entitled "Female Destinies: Upbringing, Life Projects, and Survival Strategies."

⁶ Basic products could be purchased against personalized points and cards distributed to each family according to the number of family members.

⁷ On the "meat epic," see also Cernat, "Cozi și oameni de rând în anii '80," 193: "It was all a sort of a 'hunt'—especially when people were queuing for meat, they would rediscover their primitive hunting instincts. This happened despite the regime's regular food policy, patented by Dr. Iulian Mincu (nicknamed Dr. Mengele), whose aim was to transform the population into a herd of domestic harmless ruminants by rationalizing deprivations and promoting vegetarianism."

derived from it—is a staple food, basic but venerated; it was associated with family culture and was at the core of special preservation and cooking techniques. Thus the interview question: *Which do you think were the hardest periods in the city's life?* (question asked of thirty subjects of various ages, mostly intellectuals⁸) had an invariable answer, predictably linked to the communist period and the scarcity of food.

I think the city's most difficult period was the 1980s, when Ceaușescu had gone completely mad, when there were constant power failures, no central heating was available and the population was practically forced to eat poorly, standing in endless lines and *fighting for a piece of meat, punching and kicking*. It was a totally despicable and gloomy period which can't be put behind. I remember people invented the slogan: "Let's empty Banat's pantries!" You can't put that behind! (S. S., b. 1938—S. A. 2005, Timișoara)

The hardest period was after 1978–1979 when Ceaușescu borrowed China's model after his visit there, as some specialists argue. It was the model of a society full of constraints, censorship, of a powerful apparatus, of a foreign and home policy aimed at paying off all the country's debts, all done at the expense of a population forced to live a very precarious life. It wasn't applied in Timișoara as quickly as it happened in, say, Cluj. They showed some reserve here because of the fertility of the land, the economic potential of the region, the people's connections, which enabled them to purchase goods which were not available on the official market. But at some point after 1978–1979 people started to experience power failures, minimal central heating, we had temperatures of 12, 14, or 16 degrees Celsius in our homes, it was horrible! Imagine living without heating and electricity in winter, the scarce food, the endless queues, food against points. Worrying about what food you will give to your child, what you will have him wear, it was only natural that you wanted all the best for your child. This socioeconomic darkness, the political, individual, and cultural censorship was for me the worst part of the period before 1989. (A. R.)

The lack of food and the ordeal of everyday shopping are clearly associated with other types of deprivation, a wider range of constraints that triggered countless frustrations and pains. The recollecting discourse is deeply emotional as the memory brings back to life the feelings and moods generated by the experience of living in those circumstances: fear, anxiety, insecurity, rage, revolt, humiliation, worry, the constant concern with survival.⁹ People try to find an explanation for those years (Ceaușescu's visit to China and North Korea in 1971, the world oil crisis in 1973, and the exploitation of the population in order to pay off Romania's debts are the most frequently evoked reasons) and make comparisons with the periods preceding the food crisis. The perspective is the following: there is a point in time when things got worse, a more or less easily identifiable beginning—the events signaling the crisis, followed by evolution, a

⁸ The interviews were about the city of Timișoara and were conducted as part of the project "Forms of Urban Memory Culture in Central Europe" (Timișoara–Dresden, 2004–2006).

⁹ See also the testimonies in Adrian Neculau, "Context social și practici cotidiene: o rememorare" in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 99–100.

climax and a denouement superposed on the events of December 1989. The account is spiced up with short narratives, concrete memories, scenes, and sometimes reproduced conversations, which are employed to support one statement or another. Besides the metaphor of the fight and the struggle for food, the metaphor of the crisis works as a mental pattern according to which the memories are ordered and displayed. The theme of food and the story of how food could be obtained become an unexpected time frame for the entire communist period. Another participant (an engineer and a writer) recalled the early 1980s as the “Vegetarian Year.”

The people were quite confused, they didn’t understand what Ceaușescu meant by the “Vegetarian Year”; most products had vanished from the shops, there were endless queues. I was pregnant and I couldn’t get a pint of milk, so I had to play truant from work and to go to the marketplace for some milk. These were very hard times for Timișoara, although the 1980s were a time when we were supposed to enjoy our youth. It got very painful toward the end. I remember that in November 1989 I used all my points to get the amount of meat we were allowed to buy: half a kilo of very fat ham per capita; this was all we could get for a whole month, just a slice of very fat ham. Of course, you didn’t have to buy it, if you couldn’t or wouldn’t eat it. We also got half a bar of butter. I stood in line for hours in front of the grocer’s in the Bălcescu Square and when I finally got the ham, I had a terrible breakdown. I remember taking it and dropping it, and then I started crying, saying we couldn’t live like that any more. I felt this was as much as we could cope with, there was no way things could be pushed further. And so it happened that the Revolution started in December. (M.-J. B., b. 1958)

In contrast, the same person evokes the 1970s when asked to select the best moments in the city’s history. Her reasons are again related to “food” and she is not the only respondent to make these associations:

In my opinion, the best time for Timișoara was in the 1970s, when a large variety of goods was available in the stores, when the Corso smelled like good coffee unlike the artificial coffee of the later period which had a horrible scent. As if the darkness in our homes, in the streets, in our offices wasn’t enough, we also had to put up with that wretched “*nechezol*,” a substance to be fed to horses, not to human beings! You couldn’t find any coffee. A bit of abstinence was all right, but this was really too much. Life in Timișoara was nice and quiet in the 1970s, but so it was everywhere else around the world.

This opinion is shared by A. R., who insists on the “Timișoara exception,” which many young intellectuals at the time attributed to the city’s geographical location closer to the West:

[Which were the happy moments?] As far as I am concerned, perhaps the most beautiful time of my life—I was young, a teenager—was the liberalization which started in Timișoara in 1968 and lasted until 1971. It was a time when a teenager could wear blue jeans, listen to foreign records—especially American music, watch American movies on TV, buy foreign products, like Coca-Cola and Pepsi-Cola at the Flora coffee house. This was a huge temptation for those who wanted to show off. Flora was our headquarters—the rebellious high-school stu-

dents, the university students, and the intellectuals of the day had an oasis where we could share our joys and sorrows. We could see our favorite plays at the theater, we could read good literature—so much was translated then, contemporary American drama, contemporary American prose, English and French authors, with no visible censorship. We could communicate with others and we felt the chains of the socialist society less painfully. We lived, indeed, in a free society; people lived freely in Timișoara for many years, and the general living standard was very high. (A. R.)

This testimony during the interview only sets out the evil that was to come and indicates a common need to find such “oases” that made life pleasant or bearable simply because they gave the feeling of freedom from the “chains of the socialist society.” A novel written in the same period by Augustin Buzura, *Refuges*, deals with the same issue and points out how relative the likelihood of finding a refuge actually was. Such oases became fewer and fewer during the 1980s as the government control of individual freedoms became more and more rigorous. I had the opportunity to read extracts from my sister’s secret police records, and she was just a teenager in the 1970s. The reports quoted her dissatisfaction, expressed in a letter to a friend, with the degree of surveillance and constraints imposed by the school. She described an incident that happened at the same Flora coffee house, when two of her classmates were arrested because they were talking to a group of Italian tourists.

Other Criteria, Other Generations

For people belonging to the older generations the terms of timing and comparison are different, because those who lived in Romania during the 1950s cannot easily forget the terror and the tragedies of those years. I. C., an engineer, thinks that:

The hardest period in the city’s life was the 1950s. The 1980s were also hard enough, as the restrictions imposed by Ceaușescu, who wanted to pay off the country’s debts, led to a very precarious living standard, both in terms of housing and eating habits. There were absurd gasoline limitations, as we had to use only ten liters of gas per month. Ceaușescu wanted to restrict private car transportation as much as possible. There were numerous police units at the outskirts of the city to record all automobiles going out of town. According to these totalitarian principles, the state had to know everything, to be involved in everything. They went as far as to try to dissuade people from going to the seaside in the summer, so they could have the resorts all for themselves; we were supposed to make trips in November. I could go to the seaside in November, I thought, but then I should be allowed to go to Italy. But I wasn’t. They would control people’s holidays, their families, everything that was going on. It was terrible.

I.C. mentions an important aspect: deprivation (not only in terms of food) had a programmatic, premeditated character, meant to control the individual and

the collective time. He felt under permanent siege, coming from various directions and aimed against one's private life. There was a dramatic decrease of alternatives coupled with growing arbitrariness and abuse. "We were at their mercy," a lady from Timișoara (b. 1921) told me, referring to what was "available" or "for sale" in the shops at the beginning of the food crisis in the 1980s. While basic products were missing, camembert cheese and other rare products could sometimes be found.

Katherine Verdery has analyzed the way in which time became a "state property" in Ceaușescu's Romania.¹⁰ Paying special attention to the connections between this type of control and reduced socializing, for example, which resulted in the "erosion of the concept of the individual," she repeatedly emphasizes the links between state power and the construction of the self. Verdery argues that imposing an "arrhythmic time" by various means is a form of undermining the sense of normality, of "installing *uncertainty* as a rule" of living. The queues that could appear anywhere, anytime, at irregular hours, causing people to always have a bag at hand because "there may be something available" are the best example of such induced (arrhythmic) disorder, also aimed at controlling people's free time and their way of organizing it.

Like many others, I. C. perceives things in comparison, with ups and downs illustrated by the evolution of the ratio between costs and wages.

I was hired as a beginner engineer in 1957 for 825 lei. This is what a beginner engineer would earn monthly. At the beginning of 1960 I was paid 1,400 lei per month. Right after the Russians had left. The result was that we started to buy fridges, washing machines, vacuum cleaners. Then the TV sets appeared. After 1964 people started saving for private cars. The living standard soared. At the street corner of Maria Square, where there is an electronics shop now, there was a grocer's. Martini, Cinzano cost 40 lei then, and I earned 1,400. After 1980 the prices soared and the economic depression deepened. Food, especially meat, was scarce. Meat was exported from the Comtim farms and slaughterhouses to the Russians for about 10 dollars per pig carcass. The price didn't even cover the production costs. Poor quality products were exported at dumping prices.

Also born in 1935 in Timișoara, writer L. C. (whom I interviewed in 2007 in order to check what memories we shared of communism) looks at things from a comparative perspective. It necessarily includes the 1950s, but the chronology that was introduced above is flanked by the two communist leaders, Dej and Ceaușescu, divided by the handover year between the two governments in 1965.

L. C.'s arguments are deeply polemical and his peculiar discourse brings forth a novel, less common representation of the past, as well as a relationship with the establishment that is quite different from what has been analyzed in the previous paragraphs:

¹⁰ Katherine Verdery, *Socialismul ce a fost și ce urmează* (Iași: Institutul European, 2003).

The lower you fell, the more analytical you became, which means that those who had the experience of political prisons—themselves or through their relatives—divided the Dej government in several time slots: “slot 56,” “slot 58.” There were tensions and respite during the Dej period. Belonging to a family that had little to do with political prisons, I see Dej–Ceaușescu as a continuum. So I am naturally irritated by people’s tendency to focus their anger exclusively on the Ceaușescu regime. The latter was grotesque, while the former was terrifying. I can expect this from the younger generation because young people have no personal memories of the Dej period, but many older people are also obsessed with the cliché of “the age of Ceaușescu.” The paradox in my own relationship with communism was that, because of my family’s constant dissatisfaction with the regime, I had the childish, foolish guts to express this dissatisfaction openly, so it was sheer luck that nothing bad happened to me. I did things like tearing off pictures with Stalin in 1951 and 1952, or speaking vehemently against the regime during public meetings. I was much braver during that period when there was a real danger and many young people ended up in prisons, some didn’t survive or barely survived until later, when it was much less dangerous to express an opinion. My point, which is rejected by everybody—I had a serious argument with G. A.¹¹ about this—is that up to a certain extent Ceaușescu was our own creation because we felt much more comfortable if we had the excuse of fear. We don’t know what he would have done in fact, but it is certain that he wasn’t interested in repressing the population, and such repressions occurred only in very isolated cases. Group repression was replaced by individual repression, and great precautions were taken if the person to be repressed was a public figure. Those people were isolated, but they weren’t eliminated any more.

My point is that there was a reverse proportionality: there was a time when people didn’t even have time to react, to be afraid, before they were hit.¹² You had no choice then. You were labeled and your opportunism couldn’t save you. Take my father: they fired him in 1947; there was nothing he could do because he lacked the means. So this is my autobiographical division of communism because, objectively speaking, the Dej period also has its dark side, even if it was perceived differently.

The principle of the lesser evil thus becomes the main criterion for distinguishing between various moments of the communist period. For L. C., however, the gap between one period and another is regarded as a subjective matter connected to the specific traumas that affected the individual as well as an entire generation. I think it is worth noting that only a period experienced directly has a certain “contour” for the person remembering it: the period is not perceived globally and homogeneously, but with its internal, inherent differences.

Unlike other witnesses, who present themselves as victims of a hostile history (the sufferers of external actions or, at best, spectators rather than actors), L. C. looks at his own attitude, which becomes, in its evolution, the basic criterion for timing and assessing the Romanian communism:

¹¹ A well-known female writer from the previous generation.

¹² L. C. comes back to this idea: “Dej’s secret police were not looking for guilt, they were simply distributing it, while under Ceaușescu the danger was smaller than we had imagined, in fact we made it up ourselves in order to escape the need to be brave, in order to avoid any inconvenience for our professional positions, degrees, publications, trips” (“N-am trăit degeaba,” *România literară* 31, 8 August 2008, 31).

I never felt the danger or the fear (during the Dej period) but I slowly became calm, precautionous (during the Ceaușescu period). I had strong arguments—my family, for example—so we made a sort of a deal, we signed a sort of a social contract: *I* leave you alone and *you* leave me alone, you don't ask me to join the party or anything like that. And so it was until the end.

Presenting facts in a deliberately subjective perspective in contrast with many other recollections where they appear objectified and impersonal (*things* would happen, where the modal verb is used as a marker of distance and the individual reacted in various ways, feeling completely helpless) goes hand in hand with a different outlook on power relations during the communist period. For L. C., there was a direct relationship between “I” and “you”: it expressed, on the one hand, the individual's isolation from the group he should have belonged to, and, on the other hand, a greater intimacy with the authority, a more direct (virtually face to face) relation, both dangerous and open to negotiations. Most witnesses, especially the victims of the regime, but also those who prefer the victim's stance, express these power relations in terms of “we” vs. “they,” perceiving two homogeneous, yet clearly separated poles that are in opposition and at a safe distance from each other.

That such an individual contract was not possible, because this was not a partnership between the system and the individual or a contract signed between the state and the individual, is proved by L. C.'s substantial secret police file. More than 800 pages span over a period of twenty years, the last entry from 1988. His phone conversations and letters were under surveillance, his hotel rooms were searched while he was on holiday with his family, he was constantly reported to the secret police. These measures were extended to the entire family (his wife and children), so the illusion of protecting them was contradicted by the facts. Like many others, L. C. also recalls the “opening” of the 1970s, but he places it somewhat earlier, around 1962, connecting it to the Russian–Chinese conflict and the opportunity it offered to Dej to distance himself from the Soviet Union. According to L. C., this “opening” was only part of a clever political scheme motivated by a crisis, and it is perceived skeptically and unenthusiastically:

Then they would take it easy for a while. I remember a colleague of mine saying around 1962: “Now it's worse than before, because you don't know what to say—now you may talk, now you may not!” A certain leniency was already perceptible before 1965. Around 1963, I believe. [Are you sure it wasn't in 1964, when political convicts were pardoned?] No, I think there is a connection with this conflict. With no relatives in political prisons—my folks were already out—I didn't perceive this moment in this light. I remember though the Ninth Communist Party Congress, which was to become, in the eyes of the intellectual élite, a detestable event. These intellectuals' mistake was to keep reminding Ceaușescu of it. “As you put it at the Ninth Congress,” they would say without realizing—though they were far from stupid!—that this strategy, originally aimed at criticizing the system, was actually crediting it. The Ninth Congress was held immediately after 1965. And it triggered, culturally speaking, an

opening. I remember reading *Scînteia*, the official party newspaper, and thinking I had no objections to it! [C. C., his wife who was present at the interview, added: "In Cluj, the speeches opening the new academic year were so..."] [What was the change then? Was it strictly connected to Ceaușescu's penchant for nationalism?] No, that wasn't so obvious then. The idea was that you could express yourself freely, as long as you weren't your own country's enemy. This wasn't stated in plain words, it was only implied. I remember looking at the Students' House around 1963, they exhibited a metal sculpture by Constantin Flondor that stayed there for many years. I was thinking that nobody gave a damn whether the sculpture was there or not, whereas a couple of years earlier one could even end up in prison for something like that. This is how history works. That was genuine freedom—I speak for myself—I have always been so skeptical! The reason was not my clear thinking but my upbringing. I was so much against the regime that it took me a while to realize that something was changing. For example, I read no Romanian literature produced during the communist regime until after 1970. I thought it could not be good literature. But then I realized many interesting things had been written which I hadn't been aware of.

The time of Romanian communism is perceived as a series of "closures" and "openings," like a space that was inhabited in various ways in progressive evolution. Its portrayal by the remembering narrator brings back to life scenes from the period's films (just as a filmmaker would use archive footage for a documentary), but it also offers a careful scrutiny of the past. The narrator takes into consideration the objective circumstances (most often) as well as the subjective factors (less often) that brought about the changes. This is made possible by shifting the point of view (actor, witness, analyst), and by measuring the distance between past and present that appears in any memorial discourse, as well as the degree of the narrator's involvement when looking into himself. Apart from the questions asked by the interviewer, the respondent asks his own questions: What external factors produced a certain situation? What were its aspects? How did he perceive it back then and now (the gap between these two moments is rarely captured)? Why were all those things happening?

Even if this is not the only criterion, as far as I could tell there was a widespread tendency of transforming the availability of resources into a barometer of life in the socialist system and a filter between better and worse periods. The boundaries are fuzzy in a fluid landscape, where the material assets define the more or less stable landmarks of history or the experience of daily life. This depends on the generational experience, as well as on the social or professional status of the respondents, which also influenced the type of their discourse. Some of the recurrent reference points in the interviews were the years 1962–1963, 1964, 1968, 1971, 1977, 1987 (the strike of the truck factory workers in Brașov), 1989. This chronology, which can produce numerous entries in a dictionary of political history, is supplemented with the personalized reference points of a history of collateral events, such as Gagarin's space trip, the Americans' landing on the moon, the 1977 earthquake in Romania, or the debut of the Phoenix pop rock band in Timișoara. More often than not miscellaneous smaller

histories gain a revealing, symptomatic character in the narrators' discourse, setting the framework for their lives and for their more profound interactions with other, more or less empowered people belonging to various social and political strata.

Words and Objects: Theme Records, Inventories

The omnipotence of the single party, a deliberately flawed economy sacrificing consumption for the sake of redistributing profit, the control of resources, the development of a disastrous paternalism, and the establishment of an exaggerated surveillance apparatus are only some of the common defining features of the system seen through Verdery's analysis (2003). According to her, these traits caused the system's failure and had long-term effects on people's behavior and mentalities. All these characteristics appear in people's memory, including the memory of food, shopping for food and the associated gestures. A close look at the recently published collections of interviews will enable us to make a genuine inventory of the recurrent themes, the small obsessions, the resilient memories, the image of those who influenced our destiny or made our daily lives more miserable.

I will give a few examples from *What Was It Like? Something Like That...: Memories from the Years of (Romanian) Communism*,¹³ a book in which the memories are randomly selected alphabetical entries by authors belonging to a homogeneous socioprofessional group (humanist intellectuals). The conspicuous difference in the choice of topics to be remembered and in the employed discourse has to do with the narrators' generation. We find the hasty arrests (Mircea Horia Simionescu), the university dropouts, the betrayals and silences of the 1950s (Sanda Golopenția), as well as the memories from the 1970s and the 1980s: the endless fieldwork imposed on high school and university students who were sent to pick corn, potatoes, grapes, and various other fruits and vegetables in circumstances verging on the ridiculous and the absurd. There were deliberate humiliation drills, spiced up with the authorities' arrogance; teachers were forced to commute to the countryside, covering distances equivalent to a trek around the world (Ioana Pârvulescu); there were the bureaucracy and the ideological involvement (Ioan T. Morar, Doina Jela), No. 24 High School (V. Tismăneanu), the academic (and not only) imposters (Dumitru Radu Popa), the nightmare of finding decent accommodation (V. Mihăilescu).

The participants in this game of remembering recall the lack of hot water and the terror of bathroom taps (Ștefan Anastasiu), the cold houses, the food short-

¹³ Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu, *Cum era? Cam așa... Amintiri din anii comunismului (românesc)* (București: Editura Curtea Veche, 2006).

age and the queues, the 1977 earthquake, the monitoring of all typewriters (Șerban Foarță), the omnipresent portraits of the leaders in bombastic display, the tricks and lies (Rodica Zafiu), “the emptiness of words and objects” in a communist regime that “produced only shallow banners and slogans” (Andrei Codrescu), the sexual initiation (Ioan Groșan), the official visits of “friendly” foreign rulers (Angela Cozea), the exile and destiny (Mihai Șora), and much more.¹⁴

We can remake the communist world starting from simple lexical inventories, a practice used by the researchers at the Romanian Peasants Museum and their witnesses in the book *The 1980s*.¹⁵ The testimonies are arranged as potential entries in a dictionary of the Romanian communist world. It is not surprising that such a dictionary, transformed into a memory backup, includes, besides the grocer’s, shopping for food, the greengrocer’s and recycling, words like cheese, meat, detergent, toilet paper, eggs, bones, gas, recipe, coffee, soya, central heating, gas cylinder, milk, and cotton. Most of these products were the object of desperate searches and endless queues; there are many others around which the histories of daily life have spun a series of meanings, long forgotten by some, completely unknown to others. Newly coined terms also appear, such as *nechezol* (an artificial coffee of uncertain taste), lizards (subversive little jokes with political innuendos), the country’s hawks (kindergarten children), Swallow (a tiny car made in Timișoara and ridiculed in numerous jokes). These words are embedded in the context and circumstances that have produced them and can be understood only with the help of the memory of those years.

In the communist world, the words lost their innocence and were marred by the effects of ideology (the so-called *langue de bois*) amplified by a reality which “overdetermined” them, to use a term that simultaneously suggests the connotative and the psychoanalytical function, the norm and the abyss in their meaning that underlies a continuous reconfiguration of meanings far beyond the common language use in specific sociocultural contexts where the words become illuminating markers. A mere list (“lists upon lists, piling up all that’s trivial,” as O. Nimigean would put it)¹⁶ can gain unexpected evocative powers and can become our guide in the labyrinth of the remembered world.

We can select such a table of content from O. Nimigean’s diary, an entry dated October 1987.¹⁷ We can use it to recreate a universe that is familiar to many of us. I felt the need to make a glossary that would enable the younger

¹⁴ Smaranda Vultur, “Cum ne amintim de comunism,” *Revista* 22 29, no. 958 (2008): 14.

¹⁵ Ibid. See the collective volume *Anii 80 și bucureștenii* (București: Editura Paideia, 2003), coauthored by Șerban Anghelescu, Cosmin Manolache, Anca Manolescu, Vald Manoliu, Irina Nicolau, Ioana Popescu, Petre Popovăț, Simina Radu-Bucurenci, and Ana Vinea.

¹⁶ Gabriel H. Decuble, ed., *Cartea roz a comunismului* (Iași: Editura Versus, Colecția CLUB 8, 2004), vol. 1, 277.

¹⁷ Ibid., vol. 1, 266–67.

generation or those who are not very familiar with the Romanian lifestyle to follow easily. For these readers, it may not be very clear what some words may mean because they are too intimately connected to the context in which they were born. I have included bibliographical notes, pointing out the sources that may provide backup stories and where definitions may be found as in a parallel dictionary dealing with the semiotics of daily life in the 1980s. This enables us to “measure” the place of each word in the individual memory, while by analyzing the associated circumstances and practices we can identify some essential traits of the world it has captured, for instance social or power relations. I have paid special attention to explain and highlight the words or bits of conversations (common phrases, swear words, terms of address primarily linked to the “culture” of the queues) that refer, directly or indirectly, to the theme of obtaining food:

Queues—bags¹⁸—fuck—price lists¹⁹—the cops²⁰—shouts—slogans—oops the daisies—swindlers—white jeans—“The Most Beloved Mortal”²¹—Kent²²—contraceptive pills—video cassettes—Chuck Norris—cops—boiled juices—no meal without fish—We ain’t got any!—Hey, save a place in the line for me, too!—Don’t give it to him, man!—Hey, comrade, we’ve

¹⁸ We find an insight into the variety of such “unisex accessories,” as Aurora Liiceanu calls them, in a comic-tragic collection of memoirs by Adriana Babeți called *Sarsanela* (The small bag; derived from *sarsana*, a term for “heavy bag”). It was published in *Road Companions: Radu Pavel Gheo and Dan Lungu, eds., Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în communism* (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 17–43, a narrative based on the image of the “carrier body” that was so typical of that period. No one went out without a bag; you had to have one at all times because only God knew what could be “available” or “for sale” somewhere in town. Shopping was unpredictable, clandestine. If you had access to information, you were more likely to “catch” something. See Sanda Cordoș, “Din umbra viitorului luminos,” in *Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în communism*, eds. Radu Pavel Gheo and Dan Lungu (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 131. The principle was: “Whoever finds something for sale has to buy it. The task of doing the shopping was no longer the women’s attribute because the situation was getting more and more dramatic,” notes Aurora Liiceanu in “Permanent Unisex Accessories: The Bag and the Purse,” in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 73.

¹⁹ The farmers selling their products in the marketplace were forced to observe a certain price level stipulated in price lists. They had to sell at the same price as the state farm shops and greengrocers’ in order to avoid competition, even if their goods were of much better quality. This was an additional means of discouraging private trade.

²⁰ Cops were always present when people were standing in line.

²¹ Marin Preda’s novel was sold under the counter. If it appeared in bookshops, the queues were enormous so “getting” the book was a “victory” as big as getting a kilo of meat or a coffee pack, if not bigger. It was therefore used for barter or bribe.

²² A remarkable dictionary entry for the letter K in *Anii 80 și bucureștenii*, 201–2, designating a street in the Lipsani neighborhood in Bucharest that was nicknamed Kent. The brand is mentioned by Serban Angheliescu as part of an unexpected funeral tradition: in some rural areas people would put a pack of Kent cigarettes or coffee next to the dead person in order to use it as a fare for the crossing.

been here since dawn—rubble—cops—plastic bags²³—T-shirts—the blue-eyed boys, the secret agents—senior comrades²⁴—housewives—children—electronic watches—Steaua, the football team—Bayer aspirins—queues—drink beer only during meals—tickets—points—Is there anything for sale here?—potatoes not sold against points—Did you get anything?—I didn't, either—chicken bones²⁵—soft wine—artificial (mixed) coffee—foldable chairs²⁶—Polish gas cylinders—Vegeta²⁷—watch batteries—It's cheaper in Timișoara.—This is not Timișoara—boos—shouts—Where are the cops?!—green groceries—potato cake—porridge—vinegar—Chickens were for sale this morning—cops—fuck them all, including...!—the boys—spit—central heating—lemonade—two lei the return tax—cops—portraits—rubble—papers—loudspeakers—inspections—Back in the line!²⁸—The New Agrarian Revolution—cops—the boys—the pinnacles of progress and civilization—*nechezol*.

The repetition and collocations (including lines in a dialogue) increase the emotional effect but also the graphic power of the phrases, working in many of the writers' confessions as more emphatic lexical choices. I tend to believe that the pattern of this X-ray made up of words and objects that are understandable only among the connoisseurs, was created by Ana Blandiana, whose poem "Everything," was banned by the communist censorship in the late 1980s.²⁹ The poem hinted at the stereotypical slogan of the Ceaușescu's regime: "We must do everything, comrades!" and was conceived as an enumerating series. It included the image of "the blue-eyed boys" (the secret agents) and Kent, the brand of cigarettes that had become the most popular bartering chip. Another of Blandiana's poems called "We Are a Vegetal Nation," a metaphor of a starved, exhausted nation's incapacity to revolt, perhaps also of the strictly vegetarian diet the population was forced to go on because of the lack of meat, had a similar fate.

O. Nimigean's table of contents serves as an aide-mémoire. The queue is the most pervasive element in all testimonies and the most frequently researched

²³ Plastic bags were preserved and recycled with great care, washed after use, and folded. Many people still do this, since it was an easily identifiable Romanian practice. Given for free in foreign countries, plastic bags could be offered as presents when somebody returned from abroad.

²⁴ They moved from one queue to another and were known as the "queue hawks" (a pun on the "country's hawks," the kindergarten children who were supposed to have their own organization and club). Paul Cernat sees them as genuine "professionals of waiting" ("Cozi și oameni de rând în anii '80," 191). The negative image they acquired in the early 1990s was justified by their aggressively competitive conduct in the daily effort to obtain food.

²⁵ Packed chicken necks and heads.

²⁶ Used by the "happy few" while queuing for long hours. See Cordoș, "Din umbra viitorului luminos," 130–31.

²⁷ The brand name of a spice imported by "the Serbs" and available in Banat in the "Serbian markets" of Oravița or in the Timișoara flea market (Ocskó). The name was transformed into a common noun: it was very popular with housewives because it could successfully replace the real ingredients.

²⁸ A cry to queue jumpers or a possible triumphant exclamation when the goods were finally delivered and people were sure they would "be given" something.

²⁹ See explanation in Ana Blandiana, *Fals tratat de manipulare* (București: Humanitas, 2013), 237–38.

phenomenon.³⁰ Despite or maybe due to its gregarious nature it transformed people into “masses” just as the regime wanted; they were “stamped upon” literally and figuratively by the grueling and humiliating effort needed to obtain the daily food—although I tend to believe this was also a huge setup because from time to time products appeared in the shops as if the state was officially offering food to its citizens. The queue was the territory of strict surveillance³¹ in which “the cops were involved.” The government wanted to make sure that the crowds would not lynch the shop assistants or break into the shops where secret supplies were always available, but “the boys” were also there, paying close attention to what people were saying or shouting, sometimes arresting those who could no longer control their temper and anger in order to calm the others and check their riotous, violent potential,³² so easily controllable and so familiar to the queue member. With its own somewhat hierarchical structure imposed by individuals who mimicked power relations and organized the queue according to several criteria (as much to prevent disorder as to help their own friends or connections) and being unpredictable, disorderly, and governed by rules that could be easily flouted by insiders or outsiders, the queue is the synthetic expression of the paradoxical situation in which the Romanian society found itself. Exaggerated constraint, control, and surveillance were coupled with disorder that could easily escape all boundaries and take over. Some say that the Revolution started in Timișoara in Maria Square not only because this important crossroads was close to the Reformed church where reverend László Tőkés³³ had locked himself up, but also because there was a grocery nearby where people queued for the monthly minimal amount of oil, sugar, flour, and butter.

In fact, although they were supposed to keep the order in the queues,³⁴ the cops and the blue-eyed boys were some of the first to break the ground rules; they had access to the goods which were never in sufficient supply for all buy-

³⁰ Apart from the above-mentioned studies and Pavel Câmpeanu, *Coadă un mod de viață în România* (București: Litera, 1994), see also Constantin Acosmei, “Lexiconul roz” in *Cartea roz a comunismului*, ed. Gabriel H. Decuble (Iași: Editura Versus, Colecția CLUB 8, 2004), 352–53, and “Coadă” in *Anii 80 și bucureștenii*, 100–109.

³¹ Paul Cernat in the above-mentioned study: “Any crowd, any human mass had to be infiltrated, surveilled, ‘intoxicated and processed,’ a gigantic experiment on guinea pigs” (“Cozi și oameni de rând în anii ’80,” 195).

³² Paul Cernat analyzes this potential and actual violence in “Cozi și oameni de rând în anii ’80,” 192–94.

³³ László Tőkés is a Romanian-born Hungarian bishop of the Reformed Church and politician. In December, 1989, an effort to transfer him from his post as an assistant pastor in Timișoara and to evict him from his church helped trigger the Romanian Revolution, which overthrew Nicolae Ceaușescu and spelled the end of the communist era in Romania.

³⁴ One of my parents’ neighbors, a general’s wife, boasted once about reporting on an old man to the secret police because he had complained about Ceaușescu in a queue toward the end of 1989. Her “vigilance,” of which she was very proud, led to the old man’s prompt arrest.

ers and, together with the apparatchiks and their protégés, they had the right to use the “special” shops, the home-delivery services, or the closed-circuit restaurants that were obviously out of the commoners’ reach. This “segregation of consumption,” analyzed by Chelcea and Lățea³⁵ played a decisive role after 1989 and continued, as the authors argue, in several ways.

Connections and Concoctions, or the Recipe for Survival

In a recent and shocking testimony, Bucharest “coffee maker” Gheorghe-Ilie Florescu,³⁶ the administrator of a shop that sold coffee and other luxury products, speaks about the connection between the availability of a certain product on the market and political negotiations (the import of Chinese cans, Elite coffee, etc.) and about the way in which the authorities themselves encouraged corruption and were involved in it. His story explains the post-1989 alliances between the former apparatchiks and the members of the secret police that were consolidated in the early 1980s, their versatility based on power relations and influence networks that were carefully perfected over the years. This parallel economy, which thrived with the authorities’ blessing (“Straight from the top!”) transformed food from a mere object of consumption into much more: a token of social standing, a bartering chip in a vertical or horizontal system, a negotiation tool and leverage in power relations. The mere access to certain products, including food, could become a marker of the owner’s or the trafficker’s power, who could use them, sell them, offer them as gifts. Sometimes it was tantamount to social success. As Aurora Liiceanu put it:

Everything that was forbidden or hard to get became an indicator of social success. A place in a canteen, in a restaurant, in a shop, or the proximity to someone in power gave rise to envy or admiration, because these privileges were visible. When someone walked in the street carrying a transparent plastic bag that contained oranges, bananas, salami, or other things, the witnesses would immediately think: where did he get them from?³⁷

This effectively altered the perception of certain jobs: shop assistants or shop keepers³⁸ suddenly became VIPs and at least some of the services of teachers or

³⁵ Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lățea, *România profundă în comunism. Dileme indentiatre, contract social local și economie secundară la Sântana* (București: Nemira, 2000); Liviu Chelcea, Puiu Lățea, *Cultura penuriei: bunuri, strategii și practici de consum în România anilor ’80* in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 172–73.

³⁶ Published under: “Confesiunile unui cafegiu,” *Revista 22* 35, no. 964 (2008), 12–13. His testimony belongs to the homonymous book, in print at Humanitas.

³⁷ Aurora Liiceanu, “Viață cotidiană în comunism,” in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 74.

³⁸ Ibid.

doctors were often bought with food. Florescu tells the story of doctors who got so many presents (expensive drinks, coffee, or “luxury” products) from various apparatchiks that they asked him to sell the goods in his shop in order to get some money, taking advantage of a blatantly illegal network. The cops and “the boys” who never mingled with each other and never crossed their well-defined territories (we read in Florescu’s memoirs), were also part of this system of exchanging services and money that was not frowned upon even by influential senior staff members of ministries and agencies working with the secret police.

Obtaining free food from the stores they were supposed to control, and turning a blind eye to the small crimes they caused and promoted, the members of these networks could easily use the situation to blackmail or to sacrifice anyone who knew too much or to whom they owed too much themselves, in other words, anyone they deemed undesirable.³⁹ This circuit, designed for those who rightfully or accidentally belonged to the sphere of power, sometimes “released” hard-to-find products in order to compensate for the common people’s numerous frustrations, to quench their hunger, to create the illusion that things were not that bad after all. The regime used such emergency exits much as it used the diversion of queues—as a precaution.

Such was the case of an institutionalized exception in Timișoara, the Comtim pig farm that worked only “for export” but had its own shop downtown—a Western-type supermarket that occasionally sold, according to carefully predetermined rules, meat and meat products at a time when they were impossible to find anywhere else. The four-line queues could last for many hours and sometimes people stood in line again after purchasing the desired products, taking the risk that they might emerge empty-handed from the second attempt but eager to take the chance of getting something extra to save for the following weeks or months or to send to friends in Bucharest, things that had completely vanished from the capital’s regular stores (my trips to Bucharest, for example, were awaited impatiently by all my friends).

The meat products were delivered on several levels. First was the closed circuit accessible only to the empowered citizens, those who were not supposed to go hungry in exchange for blind obedience to the state and the party. They were also used in exchange for various services between peers within the network, as well as between people standing at different pegs in the hierarchy (the factory managers in Timișoara would take bagfuls of meat and other “luxury” food products to ministries in Bucharest in exchange for funding or other benefits, which sometimes included their own top positions). Then there were the regular stores (with queues). The third level was for well-connected people (the shop assistants or the shop keepers would hide and then redistribute products in order

³⁹ Florescu describes the offstage scenarios that led to the physical elimination of Gheorghe Ștefănescu, the winemaker whom Ceaușescu sentenced to death.

to return favors). Finally, the Comtim staff was allotted a monthly meat ration and resold some of it to common people who were forced to buy meat at a much higher price (this was my own case). These workers usually sold the meat they received officially, but some of them stole more products from the slaughterhouse and ran their own meat trade operations.

The authorities must have been aware of such practices that proliferated and encouraged corruption in all power networks at all social levels. Those who disapproved were automatically excluded or excluded themselves. It was much easier to control and manipulate the vulnerable ones, so it was wise to lead as many people as possible to temptation. The regime covered up for its employees' crimes and the same model was reproduced throughout society.

Against the desolate background of empty shelves, with products purchased after endless queues in all the regular groceries, especially for pig legs or chicken bones, the opening of the Comtim slaughterhouse looked like an unexpected rescue mission not only for the inhabitants of Timișoara, whose vast majority vividly remembers it when talking about the 1980s. This was also a way to prevent strikes or revolts, as it happened in Brașov:

Yes, this led to strange situations which forced the local and the central authorities to lie. They lied about meeting deadlines and never did. The Brașov strike was caused by the economic crisis, by the fact that the workers were given only 60% of their wages; this meant that the employees with small wages brought home almost nothing. The food was sold against points, people could get only 300 grams of bread in Brașov. This situation was created by Ceaușescu in the 1980s when he wanted to pay all the country's debts. Nobody knows where all this money went to, it could have got into his private bank accounts. Some say now "You could buy anything." The hell you could. You could buy chicken claws from Unic,⁴⁰ chicken claws for sale. In July 1989, when they made the city center a pedestrian zone, they made a big fuss about it, they displayed packed chicken claws in the shop windows.⁴¹ You could buy bones. In Bucharest, people would stand in line for bones. All around you, there were only queues, endless queues. I used to take meat to my family in Bucharest, when we could find it at Mișu's, when he took pigs from Cârpan's.⁴² So we queued and bought meat every now and then. Some bought stolen meat from Comtim, it was one hundred lei a kilo, three times the regular price. (I. C., a Timișoara engineer)

⁴⁰ Explanation in the interview: "There was this famous shop, Unic, in the city center. It's gone now. It was a grocery, after the first corner, not next to the cathedral but further down, next to the shoe shop. Its windows got smashed during the Revolution and for two weeks nobody cared to touch those pathetic spinach cans. Nobody wanted them."

⁴¹ The same famous chicken bones.

⁴² The Comtim general manager, a local tycoon and one of Ceaușescu's protégés, was elected prefect after 1989 after some of Timișoara's inhabitants, who had not forgotten his services to the local community, demanded: "We want Cârpan because he was born in Banat!" This was possible although Comtim was suspected of providing the secret police with refrigerating vans for the transportation of the missing victims of the Revolution who disappeared from the District Hospital on 19 December 1989, when they were carried to the Bucharest crematory. Even if this was just a rumor, it deserves more careful consideration.

This process of establishing areas of accessibility and prohibition that separated the happy few from the commoners, but also the commoners from one another, became more and more dramatic, until it acquired absurd proportions just before the Revolution, when a series of extra prohibitions were introduced by the regime. People had to prove with papers that they lived in the city where they went shopping, and they had to buy limited amounts of food. These criteria diverted people's attention from the real issue of social segregation and turned their revolt to unexpected targets, such as other unhappy buyers who had managed to "get" something: *Don't give him anything, man!* The lack of more substantial food (meat), aggravated by the absence of daily bread, made the situation unbearable.

[What could you buy with the help of the home delivery system?] They didn't have meat. Before the 1980s, when life was still all right, you could still find things there, but in the 1980s they had nothing. I can't even believe there was nothing to buy. I sit and think what things they put on the shelves in shops. When my elder daughter was a high school student in Galați, around 1988–1989, I wanted to buy some bread and I didn't have points in Galați. I asked the shop assistant, it was very late: "Madam, please, give me at least a quarter of a loaf," but she wouldn't give me anything, so I said: "If I had begged for a piece of bread, I might have got it." There was no food you could buy in shops, only spinach cans. Of course, this had an impact on me. (G. B.)

Exceptions to this are also reflected in people's recollections. Some workers took part, under the supervision of their employers, in the transformation of their factory's products into what Caroline Humphrey, quoted by Chelcea and Lățea,⁴³ calls "exchangeable resources." This concept, according to the two authors, refers to surplus products that were not recorded in the official papers and were handed out under the counter afterwards. These exchangeable resources were the main economic support of "traffickers and frauds" and of the network of services and return services that helped some thrive.

Food, Words, and Power

A perfect illustration of the way in which such resources were used in exchange for food (and not only) and of the implications of these practices on power relations is available in the interview of F. I. (b. 1959) about the period 1981–1982, when she worked in a state-owned furniture workshop in Iași.⁴⁴ She is one of

⁴³ Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lățea, "Cultura penuriei: bunuri, strategii și practici de consum în România anilor '80," in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 153–54.

⁴⁴ The interview was conducted in 2000 and published in Dan Lungu, *Povestirile vieții. Teorie și documente* (Iași: Editura Universității "Alexandru Ioan Cuza," 2003), 120–83. The quoted excerpt is on page 124.

those who miss the communist regime because she had financial advantages and access to resources (segregation appeared even between various departments in the same institution) according to a practice which she describes in detail, somewhat enthusiastically and, of course, nostalgically (at the time of the interview she was unemployed). Food had an important place among those resources.

There was no such thing as having no money, no food, no fruit! You didn't have to stand in lines! [Why?—the interviewer asked.] When the supplies were out, we said: "Boss, we want meat," or "Boss, we want wine," or "Boss, we want cheese. We want this and that. We want chickens." He had connections in Avicola, the national chain of chicken farms. Because our boss was very much into food distribution. He would take plastic cases—we also made such things—or needle cases, safe boxes, other boxes that people needed, and he would put them in his car and when he returned, he had bagfuls of chickens and eggs. Why would I have to queue for eggs then?

In the same manner ("when we made these connections," F. I. says, "we" including the boss and all the workers in that department) she could obtain, together with her colleagues, milk, oranges, tangerines, lemons, figs, Ness Amigo coffee, beer, and Pepsi from the party canteen, because her boss was also a party secretary. "When there was no meat at work, there was surely some at the slaughterhouse. Now I can say this, I'm free to talk. They all stole from the slaughterhouse. Some stole one kilogram, others trucks full of meat—the bosses, the managers."⁴⁵

How did the employees reward their boss for his services? With presents on his birthday, with money collected on payday for champagne and Kent, but also with strictly observed silence, because the boss "had connections everywhere" and was "very often asked for help." The boss also decided how many hours his team should work and how much free time they should have (F. I. worked for only two to three hours out of the standard eight-hour working day).⁴⁶

F. I.'s narrative reflects the hyperbolized image of the boss, whose power was not only profitable for himself and his workers, but also a source of immense prestige because he "opened all doors" and "got everything he wanted." I believe this feeling was a comfort for the boss himself, increasing his self-esteem and making him feel equal to those "he served";⁴⁷ they served him in

⁴⁵ Ibid., 125. Recent fiction has also immortalized the phenomenon. See, for example, Radu Aldulescu's *Mirii nemuririi* [The bride and groom of immortality] (Iași: Polirom, 2006) (the character of Mirela is reminiscent of F. I. in many ways, except that her destiny is different) or memoirs. See Cerasela Nistor, "Cerul negru-rozaliu..." in *Tovarășe de drum. Experiența feminină în comunism*, eds. Radu Pavel Gheo and Dan Lungu (Iași: Polirom, 2008), 153–73.

⁴⁶ Lungu, *Povestirile vieții*, 126, 134, 141.

⁴⁷ See also how these practices (including stealing) altered people's ethic concepts, judgment and behavior: "Context social și practici cotidiene: o rememorare" in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 102.

turn, for example, the doctors (when he helped people to be admitted into hospitals for treatment)⁴⁸ or other high-ranking party members. For F. I., her boss is the embodiment of power in general—good power, of course, perceived as paternalist, unquestionable authority. This mental pattern was intensely promoted under communism as a result of the above-described complicities and unfortunately continued after 1989.

The description of these social microcosms forces us to remember and to use certain phrases and word meanings that express specific behaviors and mentalities preserved by the language. In the lists above, I have put them in inverted commas because many interviewees feel the need to consider them quotes in their narratives accompanying their own words and creating a distance from the narrated events. This happens unless a spontaneous language is used, as in F. I.'s narrative where she completely identifies with her account because it is her way of living through memory in a world she misses.

In the contemporary Romanian language many of these words have a negative meaning. I would mention, for instance, the idiom “to take care of oneself,” a very common phrase and practice in the 1980s. Talking about the way in which a young mother would find food in December 1989, involving the entire family in the search, Sanda Cordoș notices that, when asked to remember that situation, one is tempted to select among the possible synonyms those words in which the practices of the time are deeply embedded: “Most of the things the baby needed were not bought, but—thanks to complex networks—obtained by someone who solved our problem, someone placed at the other end of a chain of connections that had saved us.”⁴⁹

Her testimony goes on with the description of the system the family had perfected in order to “obtain” food, as well as of her modest diet as a student in the 1980s.⁵⁰ The list contains potatoes (when she got them from her family, who lived in the countryside), canned fish, vegetable ragout (which could also be transformed into a broth following a certain recipe), “army biscuits” (this is what we called them), and caramel tea, reminding us that the period was characterized not only by the practice of coining words, but also by food metamorphoses. The ersatz is undoubtedly an emblem of the age: *nechezol* is probably its most typical illustration, a “corrupted” coffee (basically made of chick pea or barley, but the actual ingredients were a mystery) that tasted dubiously in a colorless (grey) and tasteless world. To make food more interesting and varied, housewives had to be very imaginative: they created the *potato cake* on Nimi-

⁴⁸ Lungu, *Povestirile vieții*, 128.

⁴⁹ Cordoș, “Din umbra viitorului luminos,” 129–30.

⁵⁰ See also the diet of a young teacher as an entry dated 29 September 1988 in O. Nimigean's diary in *Cartea roz a comunismului*, ed. Gabriel H. Decuble (Iași: Editura Versus, Colecția CLUB 8, 2004), 276.

gean's list, *semolina caviar*, which a friend of mine mentioned recently, and better still, *beans-and-onion caviar* or even *stuffed cabbage made of minced salami and lime tree leaves (!)*.⁵¹ "People used to improvise in the most unexpected, absurd manner," says a witness.⁵²

The conversions of old-time recipes with lots of butter and eggs like in Sanda Marin's *Cookbook* (which I inherited from my grandmother) would make up for the absence of cookies and for hunger in general. The feasts were only imaginary, as in Rodica Binder's essay on cooking⁵³ in which she remembers the years when she worked at the Timișoara University Library (where she ended up after being expelled from the department she had worked in because she was preparing to emigrate to Germany). In a similar library Aurora Liiceanu exchanged cooking tips with her colleagues in a collective attempt to "warm up their imagination," compensating for the frustrations caused by the food crisis.⁵⁴

But the ersatz characterized the Romanian society in a broader sense. Its reality was replaced in the official discourse by the great fraud of the "Golden Age" embellished with bombastic speeches and lies about the "grand achievements" (the president used to speak in a thick dialect), a discourse that made our lives even more unbearable. As the crisis deepened, as food got scarcer and the constraints harsher, the party propaganda placed the population "at the pinnacles of progress and civilization."⁵⁵

⁵¹ "Înlocuitor" in *Anii 80 și bucureștenii*, 196–97

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Rodica Binder, "Entre la *madelaine* de Proust et l'Oignon de Günther Grass," presented in French during the workshop "Norms, Practices and Representations Making Up the Lexical Field of Cooking," New Europe College, Bucharest, 29–30 June 2007. See http://www.memoria.ro/francais/articles_en_francais/comunicare:_manger_comme_chez_soi_quand_on_est_ailleurs_:_deux_etudes_de_cas/1841/.

⁵⁴ Aurora Liiceanu, "Cotidianul comunist," in *Viața cotidiană în comunism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 73.

⁵⁵ See Nimigean's table of contents above.

9. “Forbidden Images?”

Visual Memories of Romanian Communism Before and After 1989

Simina Bădică

I am a child of the 1980s. No matter how different my life is now from what could be imagined for a child born and raised in Ceaușescu's last and craziest decade, I will always know I come from a different world. My academic research so far could be summarized as trying to explain and understand this different world and the people who inhabited it.

One of these people was my father. Besides being a chemistry teacher and my father, he was also an amateur photographer with a Zenit camera and a basic kit for developing his films in the dark room improvised in our small bathroom. He was one of the many amateur photographers in Romania, as this hobby was officially endorsed by the communist state. Practically every family had someone who would visually record their best moments together. In December 1989, when the fighting started on the streets of Bucharest, my father took his camera and spent long hours on the streets documenting the city in revolutionary turmoil. Upon returning home, he hurried to his improvised photographic laboratory to develop the films. Unfortunately, he made a beginner's mistake and mixed some wrong ingredients which completely destroyed the pictures he took that day. He recalls he was so upset that he instantly decided to give up photography forever. And he did, which makes the first nine years of my life, the communist years, very present in our family albums, only to be followed by a deep visual silence. Paradoxically, I have better visual documentation of my life during communism than during the transition. Paradoxically, I say, because the situation is exactly the opposite when one looks for photographic images documenting Ceaușescu's Romania.

I have always felt the power of images to be greater than that of words; as I was finishing writing my MA thesis on queuing in 1980s Romania, it struck me that I have not encountered a single image of a queue. Instead, I gathered my research data from interviewing people who would describe in vivid details the long and tiring queues in socialist Romania. The frustration of not being able to

visually document 1980s Romania, together with the knowledge that so many people at the time had a camera in their hands, were the starting point of my research for the Remembering Communism project.

Communism¹ is fashionable again in Romania and all over Eastern Europe. Not its ideology, its leaders, nor its “achievements,” but its visual wrapping. Communism acquired a postmortem visual identity made of soap advertisements, vintage objects, and television series. What seem to be lacking are the images of communist reality; not television programs, not fashion magazines, not propaganda, but everyday life images. What communism looked like for a Romanian living through the 1980s is very different from what it looks like, retrospectively, today.

Despite the wide-spread image of a tamed Romanian people, the production of counter-images was a hygienic activity, meant to preserve one’s sanity in an age that seemed to be going mad. Whether the intent behind producing images was historical, memorial, or ethical, as long as these photographs had no immediate use (as most of them would immediately be censored), they were made for another (future) world. As though in answer to the question *What would you put in a time capsule that would be opened in a hundred years?*, some people in 1980s Romania were preserving images of the world around them. These images will not necessarily tell us more about Romanian communism or Romania in the 1980s. What they could reveal, however, is what those people thought worth preserving, perhaps in a time capsule, as a document of their age and their lives in 1980s Romania.²

This chapter explores the conditions of image production in Romanian late communism (late 1970s and 1980s). By understanding this specific context, one can grasp the contemporary lack of images documenting communism and the conditions surrounding the rare images that were produced as witnesses of their times.

¹ There is a terminological overlap between communism and socialism that forces me to use both terms referring to the same reality. Romanian academia and everyday speech prefer to call the 1948–1989 regime “communist.” Western academia as well as Hungarian, Bulgarian, Czech, etc., call it “socialism,” “actual socialism,” “real socialism,” and so forth. I personally prefer the latter as it is historically more accurate. Even in the Romanian case, the regime never claimed to have reached the stage of communism and the country was called the Socialist Republic of Romania. However, the ruling party called itself “Communist.”

² A different analysis of the same research material can be found in my article “Historicizing the Absence: the Missing Photographic Documents of Romanian Late Communism,” *Colloquia. Journal of Central European History* 29 (2012): 40–62.

Forbidden Photographs and Personal Images

In December 2007, an exhibition of the photographs of Andrei Pandelescu³ opened in the center of Bucharest, in one of the art galleries of the National Theater. Curated by the National Museum of Contemporary Art, the exhibition was the first photographic exploration of everyday life during Romania's communist years. The exhibition, entitled "Forbidden Photographs and Personal Images,"⁴ was an unexpected success and its closing was postponed twice to accommodate the high turnout. The guest book of the exhibition testifies to the great emotional impact the photographs had on their viewers. One must not imagine that Andrei Pandelescu's images revealed some hidden truth about the communist regime; he did not have access to the "underground," the backstage of communist reality and power; his photographs were taken in broad daylight. They were indeed images of everyday life that almost every Romanian citizen has seen at least once in his/her lifetime. The emotional impact the exhibition had on its visitors did not come from surprise but from recognition. People who lived parts of their lives during the communist regime recognized themselves, their families, their city, and their lives. And in recognizing those images as "theirs" they also understood how much they had already forgotten.

It may be true that the reactions recorded in the guest book are the most emotional ones. However, one cannot deny the force of the exhibition. For the first time in almost twenty years people were confronted with images of their past; not the propaganda images that appear from time to time on TV. The images that were produced by the regime in order to represent itself are immediately recognized as "fake," a kind of fakery that provokes nausea in their viewers; they do not trigger recognition. Pandelescu's images bring back a world that seemed lost, at least visually, and seems to have remained only in the minds of those who lived it, a world that was slowly dying away even in those memories.

The remarks of the visitors revolved around their own forgetfulness ("We are amazed! How could we have forgotten all these things?"; "God, do we forget easily!")⁵ and the courage of the photographer ("How much you must have risked to photograph everyday reality, thank you for having the courage to take these photographs!"; "Thank you for having the courage and taking the chance to see what others were not allowed to, or did not want to see"). Some visitors

³ Romanian architect and photographer Andrei Pandelescu started his photographic career in the 1970s.

⁴ Most of the photographs included in the exhibition were published in Andrei Pandelescu, *Martorul-Surpriză. Fotografii necenzurate din comunism* (The Surprise-Witness: Uncensored Photographs from Communism) (București: Compania, 2008).

⁵ The notes from the guest book were transcribed by the photographer himself on his blog, <http://www.ap-arte.ro/ro/blog/blog-vechi/articol/idei-din-parerile-publicului-in-caietul-de-impresii/165/6339.html>.

saw the exhibition as a display, a proof for future generations of what Romanians lived through and suggested children should make mandatory visits to the exhibition.⁶ The younger visitors, who had no personal memories of life in the Socialist Republic of Romania, confessed that the stories they heard about communism finally had a face, an image.

How can one account for the success of the exhibition? One of the best young Romanian photographers, Cosmin Bumbuț, says: “Andrei Pandeale’s photographs are the only documentary photographs made with humor and interest, the only ones that pass the test of time. They are the first pre-1989 social photographs that show more than the document itself.”⁷ Their aesthetic qualities too, made the exhibition so popular. Pandeale’s images are not merely documenting everyday life during communism: they are valuable images where one can find Barthes’s *punctum*,⁸ that which arrests the gaze.

In addition, they are not accidentally documentary; the photographer did not want to photograph a building and accidentally photographed a queue, he did not want to photograph a street and accidentally captured its emptiness. His images were intended to become documents of everyday life during communism. For instance, one of Pandeale’s photographs shows a crowd whose attention is directed toward a man gleaming with joy, holding a carpet in his arms.⁹ The story of this image is told by the photographer in *Punctum* magazine. He recalls he was waiting for carpets to be sold in some shop, not in order to buy one, but to be able to photograph the joy of having “bagged” such an unexpected item, the carpet. Why the carpet?

Happiness is a ratio between achievements and hope. If hopeless, unexpected success can fill you with joy. I had seen those bursts of sincere joy, but they were not easy to capture in a photograph. When the queues were big, you could not even enter the shop, let alone take photographs. At the exit the prey, already wrapped in bags, could not be seen any more. Only big acquisitions remained visible. They could not wrap furniture or carpets. I had been waiting for a long time for carpets to be sold in some accessible place.¹⁰

Pandeale’s lifelong friend, Dan Dinescu, himself a photographer, elaborates: “On the surface he is lucky; in reality, he knows what he wants. He is often there at the right place, at the right time. His photographs are so self-evident

⁶ The mandatory visits for schoolchildren and students (mainly to museums and factories) were a common practice in socialist Romania.

⁷ Amos News article, 21 December 2007, <http://www.amosnews.ro/arhiva/fotografii-interzise-inainte-sarbatori-21-12-2007>.

⁸ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida* (London: Vintage, 2000).

⁹ Andrei Pandeale did not grant permission for his photographs to be reprinted in this volume. Some of them can be seen in his Romanian album Pandeale, *Martorul-Surpriză* or on his blog: <http://www.ap-arte.ro/>.

¹⁰ Andrei Pandeale, “Confortul dorit și bucuriile sărăciei,” *Punctum* 2 (April 2007), 73–75.

there is no need for words. Even I see in them more than I saw at the place where the photograph was taken."¹¹ This seems to be a rephrasing of Henri Cartier-Bresson's "decisive moment"; Pandeale counts the French photographer among the greatest and had the opportunity to meet and accompany him while Cartier-Bresson was visiting and photographing Romania in 1975.¹²

Sometimes, there is a "decisive moment" that one captures, or not. Pandeale tells the story of photographs that he missed: "Just then an old man passed by with two strings of toilet paper crossed on his shoulder, freshly from the shop. I didn't have the strength to push the button. He would have realized what I was doing."¹³

Becoming Witness

Capturing socialist everyday life was not merely a question of courage, of capturing the "forbidden image"—it was also a question of seeing that special something in a landscape that seemed "normal" for everyone else. What photographer Andrei Pandeale had and others did not was a program, a project to photograph what others dismissed as banal or uninteresting, a project to become a witness. Nowadays, Pandeale describes himself as an "architect, photographer and witness."

His project started with the need to reclaim a vanishing world: in 1980s Bucharest entire old neighborhoods were beginning to be torn down; buildings and streets were disappearing overnight as part of Ceaușescu's urban systemization plans.¹⁴

In 1981 I found out Ceaușescu had decided to destroy a part of the city. The initial idea—images with the landmark buildings that were to disappear—came out better than I expected. The project evolved together with the dictator's satisfaction to brutally demolish one-third of the historical center. Parallel to that, I started photographing everyday life as a tragic comedy. I was hoping to be able to gather the photographs, twenty years later, in a book.¹⁵

The idea that these images would be printable in twenty years was very brave and rare in 1980s Romania. One of the landmarks of the period, one of

¹¹ Amos News article, 21 December 2007, <http://www.amosnews.ro/arhiva/fotografii-interzise-inainte-sarbatori-21-12-2007>.

¹² The story of Cartier-Bresson's visit to Romania is recalled by Pandeale in "Cu Henri Cartier-Bresson prin București," *Foto-Magazin* (January 2004), http://www.foto-magazin.ro/despre-fotografie_open.php?art=despre-fotografie_hcbbucuresti.php.

¹³ Pandeale, "Confortul dorit și bucuriile sărăciei," 75.

¹⁴ Darrick Danta, "Ceaușescu's Bucharest," *Geographical Review* 83, no. 2 (1993): 170–82. Dinu C. Giurescu, *The Razing of Romania's Past* (New York: World Monuments Fund, 1989).

¹⁵ Andrei Pandeale, quoted by Elena Vlădăreanu in "Fotografii interzise," *România Liberă*, 22 December 2007.

the things that made it so uniquely unbearable, was the general feeling that it would last forever. This is the reason and the context that makes Pandeale's project so unique.

The "Forbidden Images" exhibition was a special, unprecedented event in Romania dealing with memories of communism. Conceived as a photographic and not as a historical exhibition, it did not present a strong discourse on the communist past. At the same time, visitors came to "see" the communist past. Even though most of the images had captions (some long and descriptive), the photographs were the genuine focus of the exhibition and visitors had to face the images, nothing but images. There was no added information, no mise-en-scène of the communist past, no framing. The images stood alone in front of the visitors inviting contemplation, wonder, imagination, and recognition. Allowing the visitor to construct their own story in an exhibition is quite unprecedented in Romania, particularly when exhibiting communism.¹⁶ In a country that was still communist twenty years ago, people very often expect museums and exhibitions to teach them about communism.

Photographic Censorship in Socialist Romania

As the exhibition was entitled "Forbidden Images," one naturally wonders what was forbidden about these images. Was it their publication or their production? Was it forbidden to own a camera, to carry one with you, or to push the button to capture certain scenes? The status of photography under the communist regime remains a much neglected academic subject,¹⁷ so answering these questions requires a detour through the official and unofficial rules and constraints of producing photographic images in the Socialist Republic of Romania.¹⁸

Dan Mititelu, an Iași photographer, wrote a short piece on photographic censorship during communism. Compared to the amount of paper spent on literary censorship, this is one of the rare testimonies on visual censorship:

I never discovered the grating through which our thoughts were sifted, but I kept in a separate envelope the piles of rejected photographs. Immediately after December 1989 I published

¹⁶ For more on exhibiting communism, see my article "The Black Hole Paradigm. Exhibiting Communism in Post-Communist Romania" in *History of Communism in Europe*, new series, vol. 1/2010 "Politics of Memory in Post-Communist Europe": 83–101.

¹⁷ See memories of Gabriela Sandu, working for Agerpress, about censorship in photojournalism. Gabriela Sandu, "Cenzura fotografiei de presă" [Censorship of photography in the press] in Marian Petcu (ed.), *Cenzura în spațiul cultural românesc* [Censorship in the Romanian cultural space] (Bucharest: Comunicare.ro, 2005), 325–29.

¹⁸ My research in the archives of the former political police (Securitate) has not shown so far any special interest by the secret police toward photographers or photography.

them in the free journal *Opinia Studențească* [Student opinion]. Looking at the old and new magazines, words are useless; anyone can instantly understand the functioning of "the system." By visually eliminating from the original censored photograph the elements appearing in the approved version, one can arithmetically obtain the difference. It is arbitrary. With illogical logic the cross, the solitary man, the fence, the thorns, the barriers, the muddy roads or other omnipresent "details" of our normal lives formed the big forbidden zone of Ceaușescu era's imaginary.¹⁹

The elements Dan Mititelu counts as "forbidden" were visually banned for their metaphorical meaning. There were, however, everyday sites that no one would think of photographing, not because of their metaphorical meaning but because of their ubiquity and bluntness: these were the scenes of poverty, misery, and the struggle for survival.²⁰

I consider the visual exponent of this not-to-be-recorded poverty to be the queue. A few years ago, I conducted oral history research on queuing in Romania²¹ and naturally tried to recover some visual documents of this omnipresent reality of the 1980s. I soon found out that photographs of queues are among the hardest-to-find items from the period. Pandeale is one of the few who dared to photograph the queue. In order to do so, he had to act like a paparazzi, pushing the button from above, from behind a window or a curtain, from somewhere his subjects could not see him. There were other people the photographer had to hide from: policemen or even undercover agents of the Securitate.

Ștefan Bornuz, a Cluj amateur photographer, found some images of queuing children among his family photographs. When I asked him when and why he made those photographs, he wrote back:

The pictures were made very close to my home, in the little market near Mercur in Gheorghieni district. I took them simply by chance; I didn't use to go hunting for this kind of images, something now I obviously regret. I didn't even put them on photographic paper. This kind of image, there was no one to show them to.²²

¹⁹ Dan Mititelu, "Zăpezile de altădată," *Foto-Magazin* (December 2006), http://www.fotomagazin.ro/despre-fotografie_open.php?art=ftm20/archives/2006/12/zapezile_de_alt.html.

²⁰ A telling example is artist Ion Dumitriu's (1943–1998) lantern slides series on people working at a landfill site. Ion Dumitriu, *Groapa de Gunoi* [The Dump] (Bucharest: Galeria Posibilă, 2007).

²¹ The results of the research is published in "What Are They Talking about When They Talk about Queuing in 1980s Romania?," in *Erinnerungen nach der Wende. Oral History und (post)sozialistische Gesellschaften/Remembering after the Fall of Communism: Oral History and (Post-)Socialist Societies*, eds. Julia Obertreis, Anke Stephan (Klartext: Essen, 2009), 359–70; "Beyond Hunger: Perceptions of and Reactions to Shortages in 1980s Romania," in *New Europe College Europa Program Yearbook 2006–2007* (Bucharest: New Europe College, 2007), 143–73; "La nostalgie dans la fil d'attente. La mémoire du communisme à Bucarest," *Martor: The Museum of the Romanian Peasant Anthropology Review* 15 (2010): 29–35.

²² Ștefan Bornuz, email message to the author, 19 December 2007.

With this simple explanation Bornuz reminds one of the importance of the audience for the photographic image. Images are made to be seen; if there is no one to see them, they cease to exist, i.e., there is no interest in producing them. It seems that images of everyday life did not have a public in Romania in the 1980s. Obviously there were no official means of making them public and showing them to wider audiences. They were not samizdat material either; if there was a samizdat movement in Romania, it was 99 percent literary.

Words vs. Images under State Socialism

How was it possible then, in this political and cultural context, that these social documentary images were produced and have survived into postcommunism? While Ceaușescu's regime was arguably iconoclastic and had a largely enforceable monopoly over what could be transformed into a public image, the 1970s and the 1980s saw the spread of photography as a national pastime. People not only possessed personal cameras but also improvised darkrooms for developing their films. They did not have to register their camera with the local police, as was the case with typewriters. Image production was generally placed under less strict security measures than writing. It is all the more ironic that dissident culture in Romania (as elsewhere in the Soviet bloc) was also text-based, strangely mirroring the regime's hierarchy of values.

The regime feared words more than it feared images. The owner of a typewriter seemed much more dangerous than the owner of a camera. There were strict regulations for owning, using, and moving around with a typewriter. According to Decree no. 98 (28 March 1983), typewriters became a major concern for the police, reminiscent of the concern over gun ownership. One needed police authorization to buy and own a typewriter. Every year the owners of typewriters were expected to present themselves at the local police with their precious possession in order to deposit a type sample. If the owner changed residence, they had to inform the local police within five days that the typewriter had also changed residence. Romanians with a criminal record were forbidden to possess a typewriter.

However exaggerated this law may seem, one cannot help wondering why photo cameras were not subject to similar strict regulations. Why were people who had typewriters considered to be potentially more dangerous to the regime than people who had cameras? Why would a text express the horror of everyday life in Ceaușescu's Romania better than an image?

The answer to this question goes beyond the specificities of the communist regime and touches on the level of visual culture and education in Romania. Romanian photographers, amateur or professional, were mostly educated people, urban residents with an eye for the arts and culture. In their eyes, photogra-

phy belonged to the realm of craft rather than art. Photography was not considered a creative medium like literature, music, or painting. Educated people, professional artists, those with some political views and activity, those who would dare to speak against the communist government, would not consider photography to be among their creative weapons. This is partly due to lack of knowledge about the potential of photography as an art as well as a document.

There was no university-level education in photography; the first university departments were established in Cluj and Bucharest only after 1990. A photographer could not enter the Fine Arts Union (Uniunea Artistilor Plastici) because it had no photography department. As visual artist Iosif Király remarks,²³ photography was not officially one of the arts in socialist Romania. Romanian artists who used photography as a means of expression were mostly young and experimental. Photography would record their artistic actions or be a form of mail-art, while trying to keep up with artistic developments on the other side of the Iron Curtain.

The Photographer: A Peasant of the Arts

There was, however, a form of officially accepted and encouraged photography. This was the "artistic photography" (*fotografie artistică*) promoted and practiced by the Association of Artist Photographers (AAP). The distinction between *art photography*, a form of expression for visual artists, and *artistic photography* is blurred in socialist Romania and it is not the purpose of this chapter to discuss a separation of the two terms. I will use *artistic photography* as the term that Romanian photographers used for decades when defining their work. To qualify this term, I will further on explain how the definition of artistic photography during socialism was sometimes disputed among those who would want it to be a form of art photography and those, most of the time the authorities, who pushed for a more documentary leaning.

The AAP was founded in 1957 with the support and under the surveillance of the socialist state. It grew from 25 founding members to approximately 900 in 1989, but most were amateur photographers. Its first president, Spiru Constantinescu, was a doctor and most members were engineers, teachers, doctors, or other professionals. Photography for them was more or less a hobby, until some of them started receiving state orders for propaganda/touristic snapshots and their amateur status changed to professional photographer.

²³ Iosif Király, "A Few Thoughts on Art Photography in Romania" (unpublished manuscript). Iosif Király describes himself as "an artist working with photography based in Bucharest, Romania. His visual work investigates the relationship between perception, time and memory." (<http://www.iokira.com/>)

The AAP was the successor to the interwar FAR, *Asociația Fotografilor Amatori* (Association of amateur photographers), which was founded in 1934 and was led by the same doctor, Spiru Constantinescu. Unlike its communist successor, the interwar photographers' association acknowledged in its title the amateur nature of its activities. After the Second World War, the amateur became the artist, as the Association of Amateur Photographers became the Association of Artist Photographers. The AAP was affiliated with international organizations whose acronyms—FIAP, AFIAP, MFIAP—sounded professional, but they were in fact associations of amateurs just like the Romanian AAP. FIAP (Fédération Internationale de l'Art Photographique) had adopted the motto "La Photographie Amateur à travers le Monde." Photographer Andrei Pandeale remembers: "In Europe, only the socialist countries were 'enrolled' in this artistic photography. In Bucharest, Cartier-Bresson was surprised to find out about FIAP, which had its headquarters on his street, and that countries and institutions took this organization seriously."²⁴

The AAP formed local photography clubs with regular meetings, exhibitions, contests, and publications. The characteristic type of photography accepted by the Association, i.e., by the communist government, consecrated the term "photo club art" for the works by AAP members. The Association had its own exhibition spaces and many photographic and developing materials could only be obtained through the AAP. This was an incentive for photographers to join the clubs where their activities were easier to control by the government. By joining the AAP, the photographer embraced a clear set of values adhering to a specific kind of photography and, last but not least, became an "artist." This is what Iosif Király writes about "photo club art":

Unfortunately, these photo clubs matched perfectly the idea of art as a mass phenomenon imposed by the cultural strategists of the RCP [the Romanian Communist Party]. They were used to promote an amateur, poetic and optimistic image of reality, often manifested publicly under the aegis of the "Cîntarea României" [Praise Romania] National Festival.... A curious glance at AAP publications from those years will find a mixture of clichés and symbols simplified to ludicrous proportions and borrowing from faraway sources, whispers down the lane from pictorialism (Emerson, Kuhn, Demachy), "straight photography" (Strand, Weston, Adams), photo reportage (Bresson, Kertész), and many solarizations and photograms (Man Ray, Moholy-Nagy). Quoting these masters feels like mentioning Le Corbusier, Gropius, or Mies van der Rohe while watching a neighborhood of half-crumbled apartment buildings in any city of our country.²⁵

Even former members of the AAP like Andrei Pandeale, the author of the "Forbidden Images" series, admit that "official pictures had to be as artistic as possible, artificial, remote from photography. The fake, neutral value was

²⁴ Andrei Pandeale, "AAF, amintiri vesele și triste," *Foto-Magazin* (May 2003), http://www.fotomagazin.ro/despre-fotografie_open.php?art=despre-fotografie_AAF.php.

²⁵ Király, "A Few Thoughts on Art Photography in Romania."

openly promoted, as well as photographs made according to a recipe."²⁶ He mockingly admits: "AAP was a nice club promoting outdated photography. Pseudo-photography in fact, easily distinguishable from real photography."²⁷

The Association published the bimonthly journal *Fotografia* (Photography) throughout the communist period. The journal sometimes featured theoretical pieces that emphasized the primary documentary value of photography, which was

a faithful chronicle of the ages, the most rapid and precise means of documentation; photography can see far more and far better than the best of eyes. Serving not only as a document, photography from the very beginning proved to be an admirable way of expression for a new art—the art of photography—where inspiration and artistic feeling blend harmoniously with the technique.²⁸

Not only did "artistic photography" claim its right among the arts, it also tried to banish some forms of "decadent" photography specific to the contemporary art of the period. Summarizing in 1989 the long journey of international and Romanian photography, Eugen Iarovici wrote an entire chapter dedicated to contemporary art and photography, meaningfully entitled "Vanity Fair." Despite his verdict that "contemporary art in some countries shows their abnormality," he still had faith in photography and believed it could be saved from the "vanity fair" of contemporary art:

The photographer is, in my opinion, like a peasant of the arts. Like the peasant, he is bound to the earth and the sun, the winds and the rain. He cannot break free from these boundaries. That is why his art can only live from nature in the broadest sense, from the surrounding reality.... The art of photography cannot estrange itself from nature, and because of this impossibility, it cannot estrange itself from the public.²⁹

Iarovici's book is an exception because of its emphasis on theory. Most books on photography focused on the technical aspects and paid much less attention, typically only in a short introduction, to its theoretical implications. Iarovici's main argument was that photography is both an art and a realistic representation of reality; a view which was of course congruent with Romania's officially endorsed art, all through the communist regime, i.e., socialist realism. Iarovici argued:

Even though some photographers succumbed to currents that alienated the image from reality, they were exceptions... Alienation processes and special effects are rejected by photography as implants rejected by the human body. The artifice and the lie have no stable place in photography.³⁰

²⁶ Andrei Pandele, "Au rămas impregnate prejudecățile depășite," blogpost, 29 May 2008, <http://www.ap-arte.ro/ro/blog/blog-vechi/articol/au-ramas-impregnate-prejudecatile-depasite/165/6372.html>.

²⁷ Pandele, "AAF, amintiri vesele și triste."

²⁸ Dr. Spiru Constantinescu, "Cuvânt introductiv," in *Arta fotografică în România* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1964), 5.

²⁹ Eugen Iarovici, *Fotografia și lumea de azi* (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, 1989), 205–6.

³⁰ Ibid., 197–98.

The debate about the inclusion of photography among the arts is by no means a Romanian subject. Ever since its inception in the nineteenth century, photography has put a lot of effort into competing with painting and demonstrating the artistic qualities of photography. The arguments in favor of artistic photography in communist Romania reproduce nineteenth-century arguments elsewhere. What is interesting in the Romanian case is the merging of both functions of photography: artistic expression and representation of reality. The ambition of Romanian photography seems to have been a fusion of both, with an emphasis on one over the other, depending on the period and the degree of political involvement. The photo club art is a specific type of aesthetic statement, and there is no question here of whether its practitioners are entitled to call themselves artists, or their products, art. In different cultural and political contexts, the amateur photography movement has been analyzed with the conclusion that it did build its own aesthetic standards for the purpose of establishing an elite of the photo club art.³¹ The strong state support for this amateur movement and the lack of alternative photography-related activities makes it paradoxically committed both to the aesthetic and the documentary, to glorifying the socialist state and to documenting its failures.

Even after 1989 photo club art remained a powerful legacy in Romanian photography, although the AAP, left without support from the government, disappeared under the indifferent or sometimes sad gaze of its members.³² This peculiar context of discursive encouragement of social documentary photography while, in reality, of vigorous discouragement of the same, makes projects like Andrei Pandele's all the more valuable and rich for historical analysis.

The Official Eye: The Photograph Document

In her book on experiment in Romanian art, Alexandra Titu has barely devoted a few pages on Romanian photography, although photography is generally a fertile soil for experimentation.³³ The art critic explains the reluctance of some artists, and not only artists, to use photography. Photography was not absent from Romanian visual culture; on the contrary, it was used and promoted by the regime as a means of representing reality. As most Romanians knew, the reality proposed by the regime was very far from what they could see with their own

³¹ Dona Beth Schwartz, "Camera Clubs and Fine Art Photography: Distinguishing Between Art and Amateur Activity," PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1983.

³² Apparently, the association still exists but none of the old members are members of the new association. No one knows the whereabouts and activities of this new AAP.

³³ Alexandra Titu, *Experimentul în arta românească după 1960* (Experiment in Romanian art after 1960) (Bucharest: Meridiane, 2003).

eyes. Photography was used in the press, in museums, in schoolbooks and albums as the official eye of the communist government. Photography had just begun to establish itself in the interwar period, in both its documentary and artistic potentials, so there was no significant tradition when the Communist Party came to power. They established an official regime of photography in socialist Romania, and it was a documentary one. Photographers, professional or amateur, were supposed to document the creation of the new man, the happy life of workers, the "multilateral developed socialist society."

This definition of photography is offered in a manual translated from Russian and published in Romania in 1961:

Photography, as a means that allows the recording of images from life or nature, aspects of a performance, moments from an action's development in time, interesting events, phases of rapid physical or chemical processes, and many other aspects of the surrounding world, has found a large following among the amateurs of this original way of capturing images.³⁴

According to this official Soviet dictum, photography is no more than a means of recording, a tool for capturing interesting events, a benign technique with no political or social implications. The original work was published in the USSR in 1960 and confined photography to the realm of amateur art, a national pastime and hobby. The amateur photographer, however, was still supposed to support the regime. This is the portrait of the ideal communist photographer depicted at the conclusion of a book on the theory of photography published in 1989:

The main and powerful current in contemporary photography is sustained by cultivated and sensitive photographers, capable of scientifically understanding the apparently chaotic phenomena surrounding them. They have a clear view of the laws governing the world and the universe. They have an unshakeable faith in reason, progress, and humanity. They will not let themselves be diverted, nor influenced. They go ahead practicing direct photography with no hermetic meanings, animated by warm humanity. They have a deep understanding of their fellow creatures and offer them images in which they recognize themselves, images that help them understand, images that give them satisfaction. They are not isolated and scared artists.³⁵ They actively participate in community life, accompany people in their days of feast and work, share their joys and sorrows, their accomplishments and revolts. In doing so, they become spiritual leaders of the community, poets, wise men, and revolutionaries ready to fight for truth, against injustice. There are a lot of these civic photographers; photographers that are human beings. And many more are yet to come.³⁶

³⁴ L. Diko and E. Iosif, *Tehnica și arta fotografică* (Photographic art and technique) (Bucharest: Editura Tehnică, 1961), 7.

³⁵ The reference here is clearly to those few Romanian artists who did practice photography as an art (Ion Grigorescu, Iosif Kiraly, Ion Dumitrescu).

³⁶ Iarovici, *Fotografia și lumea de azi*, 226–27.

It was obvious for anyone who had lived through the period that this type of photographer would never walk the streets of Romania. An involved photographer with a sensibility for social issues would not only be discouraged and marginalized by the regime but would risk major discomforts. The official discourse promoted this type of documentary photography, images of everyday life, people in their workplace and in their homes, under the condition that they make life in communist Romania seem nice and happy. Probably this double talk drove photographers away from documentary photography more than anything else; the concept had been so much abused by the regime that no one took it seriously anymore.

The communist framework included photography in the category of *visual agitation*. The little booklets of the communist activist contained chapters on visual agitation. The communist propaganda through images has a very long history; but in late socialist Romanian the lack of professional photography truncated official documentary photography. As the interest in efficient propaganda was waning, visual propaganda was vanishing; one can even speak of scarcity of images in 1980s Romania. Photojournalism at *Scântea* (The spark), the Communist Party's official newspaper, fell under two rubrics: "From the album of socialist civilization: New images of this country's towns" and "From the album of great socialist achievements." The former published panoramas of new boulevards and proletarian neighborhoods and the latter was mainly concerned with industrial landscapes. The visual effervescence that characterized propaganda in the 1950s and 1960s was but a colorful memory in 1980s Romania.

I have tried to record the journey of one photograph in late socialist Romania from its birth, "the decisive moment" when the photographer pushes (or chooses not to push) the button, to the moment when the photograph appears on an exhibition wall or is printed in an album, review, or newspaper. At every step the social documentary photography I am searching for was discouraged by the regime. There are people who pushed the button but never printed the image, like Ștefan Bornuz, and there are others who never even dreamed of photographing the forbidden image. There are photographers who were so tired with the official, faked social documentary photography that they preferred to retreat into the safe haven of landscapes and child portraits.

An imaginary character, Fialka Jourová, the narrator of Iva Pekárková's novel *Truck Stop Rainbows*, used to take photographs of plant mutations caused by dangerous waste from the state-owned Czechoslovak factories. "We lived in an age of documentation," Fialka said after 1989.³⁷

Romanians did not feel this "age of documentation" as Czechs apparently did. The incredible thing about Pandelescu's images is first of all that they exist. In

³⁷ Quoted in Paula Rabinowitz, *They Must Be Represented: The Politics of Documentary* (London: Verso, 1994), ix.

the context thoroughly analyzed in this chapter, one is no longer surprised by the lack of images depicting socialist reality. The real surprise is that some social documenting through images was made at all. The search continues. The big disappointment with the supposedly existing "drawer literature," written by Romanian writers in the long and cold nights of communist dictatorship, may be overcome by an unexpected surprise from photography. Today, when the interest in communism is almost fashionable, can one hope to discover images forgotten even by their authors? Can one imagine small personal archives of precious unseen photographs of the socialist everyday life? I know I can. And living like we do in a visual universe, it is my assumption that remembering communism will become more and more a question of images rather than words.

10. Remembering the Private Display of Decorative Things under Communism

Andi Mihalache

My study was triggered by both professional and personal motives. Firstly, I participated in a research project entitled “A New Perspective on the Idea of Patrimony: Object and Image in Twentieth-Century Romanian Autobiographical Literature,” and the keyword in this project was what the French call le petit patrimoine. The “little patrimony” is not a metaphor, but a concept that has been increasingly dealt with lately. Jocelyne Bonnet-Carbonell puts its emergence down to a real revolution that took place in patrimonial studies, wherein the focus moved away from the verb “to have” to the verb “to be.” “Little patrimonies” include objects that have not been museified or inventoried in any way; they do not have a market value, but only a sentimental one for their owners. They have strong identity, family, memory, and transgenerational valences. By symbolizing, quite well, intimacy and the private sphere, they are not to be considered among the famous lieux de mémoire, but among the so-called lieux de vie: the chimney, the glass cabinet in the living room, the wall of the favorite room, etc. “Little patrimonies” survive over time due to those who believe they share a given object (reconnaissance partagée). In choosing this topic, my own memories from the 1980s played an even more important role. I remember myself visiting, with my class, a porcelain factory in Dorohoi, a city in northeast Romania. Soon, I was collecting and swapping bibelots. While I did not appreciate all the “ballerinas” our teacher was offered on 8 March (Women’s Day), I found the other small figurines and the vividly colored little animals truly captivating. Every time I go back home, at Botoșani, I find them unchanged: unforgettable trifles.

The History of Some Memories

We ask ourselves: where does our idea of the *present* stop and where does our *past* start? The answer comes according to the way in which people recollect, resorting to *individuals*, *situations*, and *things*. This chapter focuses on this last

category. The recollections of postcommunism place at our disposal a symbolic geography of the interior designs of communist households. These stories are album-memories, embodying a collection of verbal portraits of different things. Regarded from this perspective, history becomes a story of the absent bibelots. They were said to play the role of mediators between the individual and the world, as *objects* become *social products*, more significant than the people that have created them.¹ One could, however, go for a more subtle hypothesis: the accessories in our houses represent some cultural codes that tacitly resist the major social changes of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. They prove that recollecting does not mean amassing information. It rather presupposes arranging some biographical details according to a narrative chart, adapted to the meanings preferred by the wide public.² It also involves what I term the technique of narrative postponing—the tendency on behalf of the narrator to save for later what (s)he wants to understand better.

The bibelots expressed a *common subjectivity*. “Bourgeois” porcelain survived under the appearances of “proletarian” consumption: the continuity of the prestigious displays on the interwar shop windows was protected by a presumably prosaic discourse, constructed on the dubious hypothesis of domestic utilization.³ Although the quality of these products had decreased in communist times, their former prestigious ideology was still persisting.

The deficiency of the postcommunist standard of living is dissimulated now by self-explanatory narratives, claiming that those heavy homes represent their owners in the best way. It doesn’t matter that the bibelots are assimilated into something old, rigid, time-worn, obsolete.⁴ Not being able to give up the velvets, cabinets, and plastic flowers, one feels obliged to show one’s fidelity to them, thus pretending to be consistent with oneself.⁵ This kind of design is articulated by exoticized objects, which do not leave us unaffected, always asking for explanations.⁶ Their persistence urges us to recollect the period with which we associate them—communism—although it did not create them.

This study also reveals a paradox of recollecting: we evoke communism as a *reminder* of that bourgeois world that communism itself had destroyed. The classic, rustic, or modern décor codifies not only some stylistic differences, but

¹ Abraham Moles, *Psihologia kitsch-ului. Arta fericirii* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1980), 8.

² Mark Freeman, *Rewriting the Self: Memory, History, Narrative* (London: Routledge, 1993), 5–6.

³ Roger Avermaete, *Despre gust și culoare* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1971), 155–65.

⁴ Barbara C. Malt and Steven A. Sloman, “Artifact Categorization: The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly,” in *Creations of the Mind: Theories of Artifacts and Their Representations*, eds. Eric Margolis and Stephen Laurence (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 122.

⁵ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 153.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 151.

also methods of administering the past.⁷ Their stability supports the self-recollections, the conservation of the self-perception, and the resistance of the social self.⁸

When we cannot represent a certain epoch any more in self-referential terms, we start talking about the objects it left behind or made disappear.⁹ This is a scenario working for the whole of Eastern Europe, emanating from the Soviet example. In 1991–1992, the Russian writer Svetlana Boym described the home of an old acquaintance of hers, who had lived in a communal apartment with several families for more than thirty years.¹⁰ In spite of the communal environment, “Aunt” Lyuba best defined herself through the little “museum” hidden in a closet. Among that bovarist collection of things there was a plastic apple, a Chinese, tackily ornate thermos flask, a porcelain dog, some artificial flowers, and a bowl defying the so-called traditional pottery.¹¹

The daily life routine is not as relevant as the décor where it is displayed, as it is the latter, with all its details, that guarantees the truth value of the former.¹² The very limited concept, *bibelot*, actually covers a wider range of accompanying things: porcelain statuettes, doilies, framed photographs, souvenirs, handi-craft articles, vases, sweet boxes, ashtrays, plush or plastic toys, dolls, and artificial flowers.¹³ Viewing this kind of object, we resuscitate the memory of the information we have about the category in which it is included.¹⁴ Its features are not perceived independently from one another; it seems that between its traits and those of similar objects there would be a codetermination relationship.¹⁵ We do not intercept the topicality of a thing, but the memory of the previous experiences, made with similar objects.¹⁶

In our case, the rapprochement between the bibelot and the communist period does not aim to ascribe to the latter the apparition of this phenomenon, but to illustrate a conflict between generations, memories, and tastes. In this context, some people’s bibelots can be found in other people’s memories.¹⁷ In Rox-

⁷ Alan Radley, “Artefacts, Memory and a Sense of the Past,” in *Collective Remembering*, eds. David Middleton and Derek Edwards (London: Sage Publications, 1990), 48.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 149.

¹⁰ Tim Travis, “Things with Souls: The Object in Soviet Late Culture,” *Things* 12 (2000): 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.

¹² Mieke Bal, “Telling Objects: A Narrative Perspective on Collecting,” in *The Culture of Collecting*, ed. John Elsner and Roger Cardinal (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), 99.

¹³ George Kubler, *The Shape of Time: Remarks on the History of Things* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 36.

¹⁴ Malt and Sloman, “Artefact Categorization,” 102–3.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 104.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 108.

¹⁷ “[C]ollecting is an essential human feature that originates in the need to tell stories” (Bal, “Telling Objects,” 103).

ana Roseti's interview with Elena Băban, a civil servant in the time of communism, we can find details about Romanian stores of the time and the escapist-compensatory function of bibelots: "there was a wonderful shop of bric-a-brac, as I liked to say. You could find here crystal vases, bibelots, china. If I had a bad day, when looking at this shop window, I was able to forget, for a moment, about everything and everyone."¹⁸

Mere décors in the past, they now conserve the illusion of a life threatened by nothing, maintaining the mythology of a carefree daily life. The bibelot does not stabilize the present, but its relations to the communist past. It is an effigy in which the capitalist present and the communist period find things in common. The bibelots maintain the memory of a former stability. They can guarantee the continuity of self-perception by focusing on the idea of the unchanged, through a consolatory genealogy, in which the present fits itself into everything that precedes it.¹⁹ Moreover, those who still keep such objects are quite aware that the current taste considers them kitsch. But for them these things represented treasured stages of life and preserved memories that they have already accustomed themselves to.²⁰

The recollections make up collections of typical little stories, just like the bibelots in a glass case: they can be arranged anyhow, without giving the impression of nonsense.²¹ Thus, people do not try to construct narratives that cover big temporal segments; rather, they always combine different "sets" of histories and contexts. For them, the event is a simple assault against the customs and habits, not a fracture in the biography.²² They do not have definitively abandoned habits or objects. Their memories recompose a moving present, their tomorrow always returning by itself, like a known past of today.²³ The narration does not have a crescendo, a scenario or some kind of an end.²⁴ Within the same biography, life stages do not neatly follow each other, most often they seem to be juxtaposed by accident. More variants of the past are thus placed at the narrator's disposal, helping him to explain conveniently one change or another.

¹⁸ Roxana Roseti, "Luxul în 1989," supplement of *Jurnalul Național* (Bucharest), 9 February 2009, 1.

¹⁹ Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 14.

²⁰ Vartan P. Messier and Nandita Batra. "Narration, Memory, History: An Introduction," in *Narrating the Past: (Re)Constructing Memory, (Re)Negotiating History*, eds. Nandita Batra and Vartan P. Mesier (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2007), 5.

²¹ Kubler, *The Shape of Time*, 96.

²² Bruce M. Ross, *Remembering the Personal Past: Descriptions of Autobiographical Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 197–98.

²³ Mark Currie, *About Time: Narrative, Fiction and the Philosophy of Time* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007), 5–6.

²⁴ "[T]hey are not factual history about a particular time, person, or event. Rather they offer subjective 'truth' rather than 'fact'" (Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson, *Reading Autobiography: A Guide for Interpreting Life Narratives* [Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 2001], 10).

A Civilization of Surrogates

Recollecting the Soviet segment of his biography, Vasile Ernu summarized in one sentence daily life in the last years under the socialist regimes in Eastern Europe: “Any standard Soviet product could transform and become something else. Magazines appeared that taught how to remodel and reuse objects.... The attempt to leave no place for the fetishizing of objects and to allow them only an instrumental purpose failed.”²⁵ The reaestheticization of domestic objects was completed by the passion of displaying and “museifying” them. The cabinets in the living room guaranteed their longevity: “You know very well that one of the home attributes was the bottle opener in the shape of the wolf from the *Nu, pogodi!* cartoon, but this was never used and was just displayed in the cabinet.”²⁶

The civilization of “substitutes” of all kinds flourished in the 1980s with the policy of self-improvement launched by Ceaușescu in order to pay the country’s foreign debts. We are already in the phase when plastic objects were invented for the pleasure to use them.²⁷ The interviews taken by Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lățeșu regarding the creative reuse of commercial goods in the 1980s underline the reinvestment of the foreign products (and their packaging) as bibelots.²⁸ Here are a few of the two researchers’ observations:

Western commercial goods, including foodstuffs, were attractive for another aspect besides their quality. They were gaining further value due to the pleasant aspect of their packages. In most of the cases, after a certain object was used, the packages received different utilizations: they were used as decorations in the rooms or kitchen, or for other domestic activities (depositing or cooking) or they were simply kept for their affective value.²⁹

These statements are reconfirmed in a collective volume, bringing together memories about life in the apartment buildings under communism. One of the participants evokes the “bibelotization” of some products banal in the Occident, but impossible to find in Romanian stores: packets or cartons of Rothmans or Kent cigarettes, bottles of whisky, or foreign perfume.³⁰

²⁵ Vasile Ernu, *Născut în U.R.S.S.* (Iași: Polirom, 2006), 123–24.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 37.

²⁷ Roland Barthes, *Mitologii* (Iași: Institutul European, 1997), 210.

²⁸ Liviu Chelcea and Puiu Lățeșu, “Cultura penuriei: bunuri, strategii și practici de consum în România anilor ’80,” in *Viața cotidiană în communism*, ed. Adrian Neculau (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 169.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 168. The “defunctionalization” of objects leads to the “bibelotization,” thus stimulating the “recollection.” It is not the bibelot that urges us to recollect, but the fact that it participates in keeping a stable environment. After many years, the age of the objects does not matter; in fact, they possess a trusted intimacy.

³⁰ Alin Rus, “Ghetoizarea unei țări,” in *România înghesuită. Cutii de chibrituri, borcane, conserve*, ed. Ruxandra Cesereanu (Cluj Napoca: Editura Limes, 2006), 17.

This custom was already there in the mid-1960s, signifying an era of the ersatz, a culture of the institutionalized imitation: a civilization of the gypsum pretending to be marble. One of the respondents in an opinion poll conducted in the postcommunist years explained:

The gift and the present ... were ... reconverted and used as variants for the word of “bribery.” The gift could therefore be a further payment for legal or illegal juridical services, consisting of objects of art or commodities, for lack of Western currency.... Lawyers and judges received: framed tapestries, red crystal vases (Bohemia imitations), Rosenthal imitation porcelain tazzas, silver and crystal or bronze and crystal tazzas, huge doilies in macramé, embroidered tablecloths, oil paintings representing edible still lifes, flowers and landscapes, sensual women, oversized bibelots (the bigger and more naturalistic, the more valuable), and, more rarely, genuine antiques. Gifts were for the most part displayed in the office of the apartment.³¹

Ceaușescu’s austerity reaccustomed the population to the policy of substitution and reuse. The multitude of “substitutes” installed a second-degree reality. The adjunct truths thus proliferated, more bearable, easy to control.

The recollections offer us different meanings for the same practice, the retroactive interpretation of bibelots being resignified in a much more complex manner in the intellectuals’ case. An example would be the literary critic Bogdan Crețu, with his memories of communism:

When I was in second grade, all my classmates managed somehow and gave presents to their mothers, publicly, on the occasion of the 8th of March holiday. Excited, they were all crowding to get their small presents: bibelot dogs, “Farmec” deodorants, cards made by their children in the handwork class.... My brother and I were not in the game. We gave her some kind of a deodorant, wrapped in a paper on which we wrote with a ballpoint: “Salami.” ... My poor mother incurred so many compassionate looks. Even now I feel guilty. Since then, we have always taken care to give, on the 8th of March, whatever we managed to buy: a glass ashtray (how could we know the glass was not crystal?) bought for 3 lei, or a bar of bad soap (the kind we could find in shops) or a handmade card, drawn by us (mother still keeps some of them: they are hideous, with fluffs glued with nail polish on a card painted in all the colors of the rainbow).³²

Bogdan Crețu realizes, *à rebours*, that the focus placed on the obviously symbolic character of the gifts was censoring the real necessities of the moment. The ostentation of the present deprived of material value was a festive and at the same time ironic (the perfume) *signifier*, correlated to a prosaic *signified* (the difficulty to find the bare necessities of daily life).

³¹ *Mărturii orale. Anii '80 și bucureștenii* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2003), 222.

³² Bogdan Crețu, “Confesiunile unui necioplit,” *Ziarul de Iași*, 3 March 2009, 6A.

Before and After Communism

Reducing a beloved object to the diminutive confers on it an aura of innocence; we tend to protect it better, as a part of ourselves. Hence the desire to individualize one's little universe, to extract personal life from the public control. Domestic behavior gets autonomous, resisting the serious conduct prescribed in times of scarcity. Therefore, the bibelots and the porcelains expressed, before 1989, a uniform respectability: after the collapse of communism, they only embodied a fetish of the poor. How much bovarism can we save into a bibelot? Under communism, the bibelot was a licit luxury, a tolerated hobby, a wise extravagance.³³ Angelo Mitchievici remembers the homes then, underlining the kitsch environment and the bovarism of porcelains.

A more well-to-do family demonstrated its wealth by the great number of bibelots kept in the cabinet or up on different pieces of furniture... This was a sign of abundance, to have many bibelots, displayed in the dining room, visible to all the envious or solemnly respectful guests... Many, quite many ballerinas, while dancing, making a pirouette or a leap, etc., but also ladies in sophisticated dresses from the court of nobody knows which Louis, if this had any importance at all... The petit bourgeois spirit was unexpectedly flourishing in the butchers', the primary or secondary school teachers', or the housewives' home cabinets—a wonderful concord beyond age, professions, hobbies, the rococo grafted into hardly legible apartment lives.³⁴

Postcommunist recollections of daily life in the 1930s risk, however, exceeding the number of actual facts of that period. An interesting thing is that many young people nowadays explain themselves by resorting to old histories, very distant from the moment of their birth. The grandchildren's lives are thus colonized by the grandparents' stories, which until 1989 had been a delicate moment in their autobiographies, as there was a risk that they might have been kulaks, factory owners, or landowners. After 1989, the autobiographies get wider, the tellers' life seeming to start with that of the already defunct relatives. Born in 1967, the writer Cătălin Dorian Florescu imagined, in 2007, a question that led to the grandfather's recollection, associated with the precommunist period: “Where did your grandfather remain, *the one from 1935?*” His apartment was crammed full of books, manuscripts, as he had written too, of silence, although it was placed downtown Timișoara... That apartment, turned, in time, small, when I saw it again *in the '90s*.³⁵

³³ Gavril Máté, *Universul kitschului. O problemă de estetică* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 1985), 49. The book should be first seen as a revealing document for the preoccupation of the party ideologists with combating the “poaching” of the communist daily life and the “petit bourgeois” evasionism.

³⁴ Paul Cernat et al., *O lume dispărută* (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 298.

³⁵ Cătălin Dorian Florescu, “Mai bine hârtia decât neantul,” in *Cartea cu bunici*, ed. Marius Chivu (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007), 149.

When we wish to miniaturize a certain universe, we go way back in time, to view it with a child's eyes. The size of the objects we remember is not what is important, but the tenacity of the diminutives we use to name them. The language orients the look: "I create a magic atmosphere through my texts"—thinks the same C. D. Florescu—"just like a child might feel in the grandparents' house, where he is safe, where it smells like pies, where the afternoons are cool and calm, where you can only hear the grandfather clock, whose tick-tock gets lost among pieces of furniture, photographs and books, among bibelots and under the carpets."³⁶

In the post-December 1989 imagination, the bibelots are synonymous with the third age. The old relaxes us, offering something from the serenity of the thing that underwent many experiences. Moreover, Ceaușescu's fall made possible the search for different precedents for the new realities: although most Romanians did not live during the bourgeois period, this became, however, a mandatory reference point in postcommunist recollections. Along with it, the rococo style came back into fashion. It returned powerfully, overburdening the flea markets, elitist commerce, and the houses of the recent upstarts.

Where do all these recollections come from? From which part of the past sheltered in objects?³⁷ These objects become pillars of memory only when people realize that they were more interesting for what they were than for what they became. They mention them more and more frequently because they know that one day these objects would have nothing more to tell us. Or that they would shut up and the objects would talk for them. They prefer a universe with no novelties, a world taken away from the becoming: their discourse thus singles out the interwar period, museifying it. That time is, for them, the last face of truth. The nostalgia for "former times" implies, subsidiarily, favorable attitudes toward our previous selves.³⁸

The human being does not give up objects, because their time invests his own history with consistency. Things are his last certitudes. The bibelots seem to be condemned first because of the parents' disappearance, then because of the children's self-exile. Upon his return home after Ceaușescu's overthrow, Ion Vianu recollected his own thoughts at the time of leaving communist Romania:

³⁶ Ibid., 142.

³⁷ The cultural anthropologists and sociologists of the mid-1990s shifted the focus from the "producers" of collectable artifacts toward their "users" and "consumers" (Adrienne D. Hood, "Material Culture: The Object," in *History Beyond the Text: A Student's Guide to Approaching Alternative Sources*, eds. Sarah Barber and Corinna M. Peniston-Bird [London: Routledge, 2009], 176, 190–91). Still, we should note whether the interviewee mentions some objects from his/her past voluntarily or whether their recollections come as a result of some further questions.

³⁸ Andreea Deciu, *Nostalgiile identității* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Dacia, 2001), 33.

It seemed monstrous to me to leave behind all those objects impregnated with the past, with everything that, after all, represented me. I was remembering my mother's death, when watching her bibelots on the Biedermeier chest of drawers and I felt quite sad that those objects did not have an owner any more. And I, by leaving, I was depriving them of a master. Of course, they were going to survive.... But the force that kept them together, our presence in that place, will not. Such a departure is a death.³⁹

That is why we do not have a history of the objects, but a history of the people who lived around them. Bibelots cannot be "dated" in a definitive manner. They do not have a present of their own, being successively associated with always different "former times."⁴⁰ That is why they give the impression that the attention they are paid is always tardy.

Bibelots decorated castles, then bourgeois homes, and eventually some working-class families' cabinets. At the end of the 1940s, the "new man" was stealing statuettes from the "bourgeois" houses to get money for food. And in the 1960s, he was buying imitations from the *Gospodarul* shops to improve his self-image. A material interest turned, step by step, into a symbolic one, the appropriation of this kind of object equaling the claim to a new social status. Romanian society was ostensibly proletarianizing itself in public, and reembourgeoizing itself underhand, in private.

Although bibelots have not appeared along with the Soviet tanks, they have the right to be included in a museum of communism. With one single reservation: we can remember the social use they fulfilled in the 1980s, but it is impossible for us to preserve the *attitude* that people held toward them.

To picture daily life in the time of communism is to speak about its rituals. We do not explain ourselves through the bibelots, but their story comes back again every time we remember how we used to celebrate, for instance, the 8th of March, International Women's Day. They can fix the memory of an individual biographical event, but also its recurrence (baptisms, weddings, name days, retirement parties).

³⁹ Ion Vianu, *Exercițiu de sinceritate* (Iași: Polirom, 2009), 55. Vianu's anxieties could open new research directions, focusing on questions such as: What exactly did we recollect in the 1980s? What nostalgias did we feel under communism and how do they persist now, when we recollect the same epoch? Are Romanians still aware of the recollections they had during communism? What exactly were they narrating to each other?

⁴⁰ These were habits upon which people were constructing a normality, a certain predictability of life, without pretending to defy the new regime. Writing to her sister-in-law, Pia Pillat Edwards, Nelli Filipescu noted on 28 August 1961: "I cleaned the rooms, I *arranged our old objects and bibelots* and I arranged the last roses from our garden in the crystal jar" (Dinu Pillat and Nelli Pillat, *Biruința unei iubiri. Pagini de corespondență* [Bucharest: Humanitas, 2008], 256; emphasis added). The addressee of the letter was in exile, and the addresser's husband was in prison. In this context, the bibelot does not have an up-to-dateness of its own, his part being that of allowing the owner to remain into a past conserved as the only desirable present time.

If the bibelots are not, as we know, a creation of communism, why do we think they signify it so well? Is it just because communism brought them back in fashion, under the democratic form of the kitsch?⁴¹ The bibelots from the communist period were then a popular luxury at anyone's disposal. At that time, they were still enjoying that dose the self-evident, natural, banal things. Today, they are the metonymy for the times with which we reconcile for the sake of the lost equality.

The bibelots are the remains of an extinct time. They could sublimate the truths that a man is not able to meet anymore. They embourgeoised the daily décor, creating the illusion that life was not only survival.⁴² In a poor everyday world, they suggested a dream of luxury. These are vestiges of self-esteem, resuscitating a more pleasant "Golden Age," just like the family photo albums. Their resilience in Romanian apartments should also be considered from the perspective of the historical culture of the postcommunist period. They point to a set of perceptions of time and mainly to the people's references before or after 1989.

The bibelots reromanticized the 1980s and sustained the fiction of material stability in the 1990s. The small things protected by the glass cases legitimate an indulgent vision of one's own biography. Anyway, after 1989, the bibelots became more important on a personal level and less important on the social one. They are preserved out of reflex, as apartment aesthetics. Each one by itself does not mean much. But together, along with the doilies, the coffee cups, and the souvenirs from vacations with trade union tickets make an *emplotment*, a small inalterable "aquarium" of memories. The trifles kept in their place are the attempt to resist, from an identity perspective, some expensive changes in taste that common people cannot keep up with any more.

Following the designs proposed by *Mobila* magazine, we can notice that the communist bibelots were supposed to fill up only the empty spaces. Having no special cultural background, they did not stir up the owner's desire to turn, like before, into a refined art collector. Only after 1989 were there hints that it would get autobiographic significations. The luxury rococo (of the new upstarts) now promoted in *Antichități* (Antiques) magazine is answered, rather instinctually, with a minimal bovarism: the individualization of the small porcelain, engraved with inscriptions like "pop Mitică—2002." In fact, the antiques themselves were rediscovered after the fall of communism: "Until 1990 ... an 'antique store' in Romania meant a store where one could find second-hand books... After 1990 ... the antique store started to mean, like in the whole civilized world, a store where old beautiful objects are sold. Immediately after

⁴¹ A short genealogy of Romanian kitsch can be found in Ștefan Cazimir, *I.L. Caragiale față cu kitschul* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1988), 11–12.

⁴² Paul Constantin, "Kitsch: calamitate sau providență?," *Mobila* (Bucharest) 1 (1983): 19.

1990, every Romanian who had an old object, even if not a valuable one, had the impression that he was in possession of a treasure and was asking a huge price for it.”⁴³

The important changes in daily life create great differences in the individual's self-appreciation. The temporal distance between what we seem to be today and what we think we once were thus grows bigger and bigger. Until 1989, the bibelot favored the individual self-positioning into a middle class, through participating in the exchanges, equivalences, and reciprocities, inherent in a *gift culture*.⁴⁴ After 1989, the bibelots helped the individual maintain the stability of the self, threatened by the break.⁴⁵ In fact, it was not the day (22 December 1989) that was the turning point, even if it is considered as such retrospectively, with the acceleration of the changes generated by the fall of communism. Rather, it was the personal incidents following the end of the regime that were much more significant for the people: the unemployment, the forced retirement, the dramatic explosion of prices, etc.

The porcelains are not enjoying a new youth any more, they cannot acquire a different social symbolization or refunctionalization. They send us in fact to the children's desire to distance themselves from the memory of the daily life that their parents lament under the impression that they were “getting on better before.” For the old, the bibelots maintain the memory of a minimal respectability, equally distributed to everyone, through “socialist ethics and equity.” That is why they felt vexed when the young asked them to make modifications to the current design of their dwellings. They said they would feel strangers in their own houses, chased from their own past. The space allowed itself to be taken over if people occupied it with things that had belonged to them for a long while.

Lost time is time that has passed too quickly, giving us no chance to significantly include it in a recollection. That is why people tend to excessively fragment their biography, fixing the passage of time in as many episodes as possible, often signified by bibelots only. The overcrowding with small objects is another form of narrative colonization of the domestic sphere.⁴⁶ An undecorated apartment is a lost place, alienated, taken away from the stories of its inhabitants. Populating it with many small things, which people know when they had acquired, is giving the impression that they could control the passage from one

⁴³ *Mărturii orale. Anii '90 și bucureștenii* (Bucharest: Paideia, 2008), 152–53.

⁴⁴ Ioan Stanomir shows that the idea of equality was then based on the underground economy, centered on the relation “favor for favor.” Money was replaced with food, bibelots, decorative objects, etc. (Cernat et al., *O lume dispărută*, 425).

⁴⁵ Máté, *Universul kitschului*, 52.

⁴⁶ “... we always collect ourselves” (Jean Baudrillard, *Sistemul obiectelor* [Cluj-Napoca: Echinoc, 1996], 61).

stage of their life to another without traumas.⁴⁷ In other words, they believe they can oppose the rapid flow of time, formulating as many accounts as possible about the private universe surrounding them. The more memories they invent, the slower the passage of the years gets. Thus, the retrospectives occasioned by the bibelots render more bearable the accelerated changes brought forth by postcommunism. And publishing after 1989 interwar memories about that period's bibelots, we involuntarily give a more indulgent reading to the communist bibelots.⁴⁸

The defunctionalizing of some things (empty bottles, ashtrays, cups, etc.) increased their power of signification, transforming them, too, into bibelots.⁴⁹ The useful object became a decorative one, the trifles getting the power to symbolize the middle-class ethos, the hosts' respectability, and the stability of the family environment. They spoke of an obvious feminization of family daily life, the memory of the trifles persisting, after 1989, especially in the notes of female painters, writers, journalists, and teachers. Moreover, the agglomeration of objects in Romanian homes imposed a permanent supervision of things, a particular attention toward their maintenance. These were fragile things, which needed, indeed, a feminine presence, a perseverant devotion, a vigilant philanthropy.

The bibelots were banalized by socialist commerce, their lining up on shelves annulling the chance of uniqueness. The private context was the one that singularized them, facilitating their resignification and the owner's reinvention. Still, beyond the store's shelves, they played the role of a festive "currency": the bibelots made us equal, but only at a semiotic level.⁵⁰ The area allocated to the bibelots was the living room: a kind of public space of the house, a guests' area, an area for birthday or New Year's parties, etc.

Things We Think With

To reiterate, do porcelains historicize our life, or do they preserve a specific atemporality, ready to support our identity, always threatened by change? Do they translate our past into the terms of today? Or, do they ensure the same present, deprived of antecedents?

⁴⁷ "... the object is a perfect pet. It is the only 'being' whose qualities exalt our personalities, instead of limiting it" (ibid., 60).

⁴⁸ Cecilia Cuțescu-Storck, *Fresca unei vieți* (Bucharest: Vremea, 2006), 142. She referred to the "cult" bibelot, from the Louvre.

⁴⁹ We also have the reversed phenomenon, of refunctionalization. See the wood puppy turned into a cigarette support in the magazine *Mobila* 3–4 (1965): 95, or the harlequin transformed into a holder for the toothpaste and brush, in *Mobila* 4 (1988): 61.

⁵⁰ Alex Goldiș, "Blocul real și blocul rhetoric," in *România înghesuită. Cutii de chibrituri, borcane, conserve*, ed. Ruxandra Cesereanu (Cluj Napoca: Editura Limes, 2006), 40.

The bibelot is not a mere souvenir, but a narrative pretext, whose function is to protect: the *recurrence* of the self-narrations, which presupposes that the individual always distinguishes between a “now” and a “then,” that he has the feeling of some temporal differences, of some different phases in his life, invoking random but significant moments; the *continuity* of the discourse of the self, that is, it can support the impression of a linear evolution, of an unchanged self, prisoner of his/her own latest present; or it could result from the feeling that time has passed too quickly, while the subject has not realized any important modification or event; and the *coherence* of the autobiographic recollection, meaning that there is no new present time, but a past time in permanent expansion; the narration does not accept multiple voices, keeping only those facts that have the chance to be prolonged in future episodes, neighboring today’s time. Often confused, the three narrative exercises have different functions.

What would be the consequences of the neo-rococo at the level of the self-recollection? How do we remember what others were recollecting? In the case of the *bourgeois*, the bibelots occupy the beginnings of the self-story, in the case of the *proletarian*, its end. For the former, they are the occasion to recollect the forced impoverishment, for the latter, to reconfirm the attachment to the epoch of the ostensible, mimed enrichment. The bibelots’ presence seemed to be self-evident under Ceaușescu, but their social role was not realized at the time, although the common Romanian bourgeois interior designs were contrasting more and more with the proletarian rhetoric of the regime. They were attributed to communism, ironically, only after the regime had collapsed, seen as a metonymy for the adorned poverty of the 1980s. These little things do not make today more bearable, but they cultivate a silent nonhistoricism specific to the new poor of postcommunist Romania.

Translation by Evagrina Dîrțu

11. “Loan Memory”: Communism and the Youngest Generation

Albena Hranova

It was my everyday practice as a university professor that made me face the problem discussed in this volume, and it was the first decade of our century that made the problem entirely evident. Students born toward the end of communism (mid- to late 1980s) knew practically nothing about it. I had to hear innumerable egregious mistakes in my classes, for example, a student once saying that communism was “a medieval event or regime” (it was not a metaphorical statement). About five years ago another student wrote in a paper the following sentence: “Nowadays, as we enter the era of communism, we are sure that the democratic tradition of Bulgarian poetry will contribute a lot to the final victory of communism all over the world” (the student happened to copy this verbatim from a 1954 text without any analysis, and even without the quotation marks; he could not understand my amazement and told me, “A literary critic said so.”). What is more, I encountered the following paradox: to my students the specific words of the communist period denoting specific objects, notions, or practices were totally unknown; yet, the language of communism was fully preserved by means of clichés, arguments, evaluation, and interpretative devices in their own way of thinking and speaking, for they could not recognize them as belonging to the communist discourse at all; instead, they took and used them as statements per se. The “Remembering Communism” project thus helped convert my genuine pedagogical hard times into a conscious research interest.

Remembering communism in Bulgaria today is as much a personal problem of those who actually lived it, as it is a public pursuit. Communism is remembered and invoked at every corner: in the rhetoric of various debates, in disputes over what to do with communist holidays, formulaic language, ritual practices, and visual legacies, in political platforms and programs, in everyday and informal communication. At the same time, there is a public feeling that many political and personal experiences of those decades remain untold. The picture seems incomplete, the evaluations are diverse and socially unstructured, and the social sciences and humanities still have a long way to go to study the communist period.

In the context of contradictory intuitions about the excessive presence of communism in present-day life and its sketchy remembrance and conceptualization, this chapter will pursue a seemingly extravagant and paradoxical goal. It will present an empirical study of the memory of the youngest generation of communism (university students in their early twenties). The study is not representative in the sociological sense and is even more vulnerable to commonsense skepticism. Why study the memory of people who have not lived under communism as mature social beings, capable of remembering and judging what they experienced? I will try to answer this reasonable question, beginning with an overview of the present-day public context.

Preliminary Notes: Remembering Communism in Postcommunist Bulgaria

Immediately after 1989, the public sphere was flooded with memoirs by former heads of state, senior Communist Party functionaries, and institutional activists of the regime such as Todor Zhivkov, Vîlko Chervenkov, Stanko Todorov, Petîr Mladenov, and Stoiian Mikhailov. A recent analysis notes several important things: a great structural similarity between the different biographies, a stereotypical, cliché language in the official vernacular of the time, as well as a specific form of remembering:

[T]he process of remembering purports to be objective. It wants to eliminate the personal perspective and generalize.... It aspires not to be a personal recollection but a collectively valid experience—collective memory and even institutionalized history. Here the autobiographical “memories” turn into official memoirs, i.e., testimonies about the regime and the state, while the personal perspective recedes to the background into a freeze-frame posture.¹

A series of counter-accounts by dissidents and people repressed by the communist regime proposed a different biographical matrix unfolding an opposite narrative of the communist period.

In parallel with the wave of memoirs, the 1990s brought a growing academic interest in the oral history of communism. Various projects by sociologists, historians, and culturologists have initiated a series of interviews in different “cross-sections” of Bulgarian society. A project by the New Bulgarian University called “History Populated with People” intended to correct the official account by drawing on living human memory and individual experiences,² includ-

¹ Rumen Daskalov, “Da si spomnim sotsializma: sotsializmîit v memoarite na vidni komunisticheski funktsioneri,” in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 171. This volume is a collection of papers presented at the eponymous international conference held in Sofia in 2003.

² Vera Mutafchieva and Marta Ivanova, eds., *Istoriata, naselena s khora*, 2 vols. (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005–2006).

ing interviews with Bulgarian intellectuals and public figures, scholars, journalists, doctors, and others. Another project looked at socially stratified cross-sections of Bulgarian society and interviewed respondents from villages, small towns, and district centers striving to identify the viewpoints of "the winners and victims of communist rule, the apologists and critics of socialism."³ A number of current projects focus on particular professional communities: historians and sociologists, writers and actors, artists and architects.⁴ Future studies will show if these may provide evidence of collective memory about communism among specific professional communities (captured by Maurice Halbwachs in his essay on the collective memory of musicians).⁵

Another very interesting project, "I Lived Socialism" (*Az zhiviakh sotsializma*),⁶ avoids specific target groups and cross-sections and provides Internet space to everyone who wishes to share their memories. The only defining principle of the random sample is the wish to tell one's story.⁷ At the same time, the project seeks to avoid the traditional memoir approaches of the Communist Party functionaries and people repressed by the regime,

because the past as personal experience remains unprocessed, appearing only in separate conflicting stories: of the victims, of nostalgia, of the people in power back in those days.... On the one hand, we have these nostalgic-authoritarian versions of the past that are taking over the public sphere and are largely tolerated by the media. On the other hand, we have the memoirs of the victims of communism, more modest in number and with fading publicity. Sandwiched between the stories of the repressors and the repressed is the silence of the everyday person and their story.⁸

³ Daniela Koleva, *Virkhu khrastite ne padat mīlnii. Komunizmīt—zhiteyski sīdbi. Antropologichna anketa* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo, 2007), 10.

⁴ This covers various projects conducted by Liliana Deyanova, Natalia Hristova, Krasimira Koleva, Iva Kuimdzhieva, and Iliana Marcheiva. For more detailed information, see the chapter of Baeva and Kabakchieva in this volume.

⁵ Maurice Halbwachs, *Kolektivnata pamet* (Sofia: Critique & Humanism, 1996).

⁶ A web-based project by writer Georgi Gospodinov, journalists Diana Ivanova and Kalin Manolov, and psychotherapist and university lecturer Rumen Petrov.

⁷ Everyone interested can share their memories at www.spomeniteni.org in response to the website's motto: "Remember Ideal chewing gums and Pomorin toothpaste? Or the work brigades, Moskviches, queues for oranges, political jokes, the frightening and the funny in those times... We offer you a platform to share your memories and your stories, things you have seen, heard, experienced during socialism. These stories can be anything you want—sad or happy, stories of dreams and disappointments, trite, noble, mundane... Let's have true, concrete and most ordinary stories. Let's speak about things that happened off camera, outside textbooks, memoirs, grand generalizations... In short, let's share our memories of the time we lived socialism. We believe that every personal human story from that time is important. It is the only way we can be sure that we are through with it and are moving on with our lives."

⁸ Georgi Gospodinov, *Spomenite ni. Vīvedenie in Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii*, eds. Georgi Gospodinov et al. (Plovdiv: Zhanet-45, 2006), 13–14.

Public silence (due to fear, embarrassment, or trauma) is perceived as a social fact, the *a priori* established context of all project initiatives, and breaking this silence is seen as the project's main social, humanitarian and human goal:

[A] shadow of uncertainty about what tomorrow may bring is still lingering in people's minds. It makes them more hesitant in their conclusions. But there is no longer Fear. If you remember, it was still prevalent in the nineties...⁹

We realized that we all have a problem to bring out these memories and recount them in a personal story. Too long had we remained silent, avoiding this subject and this period. Too many personal traumas from those times had been swept under the carpet of forgetfulness, but they hadn't disappeared—they simply lay hidden there.¹⁰

The published memoirs and interviews, however, create the impression not of silence but of a large-scale public discourse on socialism. Naturally, it does not manifest the codified and institutionalized features of a contemporary Grand Narrative about communism, nor could a Grand Narrative be produced as a mechanical sum of all articulated memories. Insofar as the memories are tautological or subversive vis-à-vis any Grand Narrative, this is the Grand Narrative *of* communism itself rather than some scientific, institutionalized, and consensual contemporary narrative *about* communism. There is simply no such Bulgarian Grand Narrative, and the present-day projects are perfectly aware of this:

[T]he hasty insertion of "socialism" into an allegedly neutral historical or social-scientific conceptual framework may prove to be—despite the authors' intentions—a mimicry of certain political values... The idea of "awakening memory" is based on the assumption that before proceeding to make grand syntheses, before conceptualizing the problematics of socialism, it is necessary to identify the agents of memory of the past.¹¹

The imminent question is whether the memory contained in the memoirs and interviews can be defined as "collective" (after Halbwachs) and whether it is capable of mapping the Bulgarian *lieux de mémoire* of communism (after Nora). Ivaylo Znepolski defines communism as a "site of memory without a universally accepted point of reference," because

postcommunism is a space where different private memories of communism clash, not limited by a universally accepted conceptual framework. This hampers the construction of a consensual point of reference for evaluating the recent past. From this perspective, for people in a

⁹ Vera Mutafchieva, "Istoriata, naselena s khora." *Predgovor* in *Istoriata, naselena s khora*, eds. Vera Mutafchieva and Marta Ivanova, 2 vols. (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005–2006), 10.

¹⁰ Georgi Gospodinov, *Spomenite ni* in *Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii*, eds. Georgi Gospodinov et al. (Plovdiv: Zhanet-45, 2006), 12.

¹¹ Koleva, *Virkhu khrastite ne padat milnii*, 10.

postcommunist society communism is still a site of the work of memory, not a site of memory (*lieu de mémoire*) in the sense established by Pierre Nora.¹²

This conclusion was made at an international conference "Around Pierre Nora: Sites of Memory and the Construction of the Present," held in Sofia in 2003 (the eponymous book cited here was published a year later). It was "the construction of the present" that caused the prominent participants at the conference to voice theoretical doubts about the relevance of Maurice Halbwachs's key term, "collective memory." Jean-Marc Tétaz calls the term a "philosophical conundrum" with the "characteristics of an oxymoron,"¹³ whereas Reinhart Koselleck posits that

there is no collective memory, but then there are collective conditions that make memories possible. What political and social content they will eventually be filled with is an entirely different matter. However, it nevertheless depends on what historians will find as a result of their analysis of the conditions themselves. In this sense, I believe the task of history is higher and more important than the claim to represent memories as collective.¹⁴

The target group of this study—young people born but not (fully) socialized during communism—provides an unexpected opportunity for interpretation tackling both the "collective memory" and the solid arguments against it.

"Loan Memory," "Memory Front Page," and Sources of Memory: The Practice of Inquiry

The study involved an assignment given to 159 students from the Plovdiv University Paisii Khilendarski in 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 (128 students from the Faculty of Letters and 21 from the Faculty of Pedagogy) and 10 students from the Faculty of History at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia/Sofia University in the summer term of 2007–2008. Forty-four of the participants were male and 115 were female. Only 4 of them were partly socialized in the communist period (born respectively in 1969, 1971, 1978, and 1981). The others were born

¹² Ivaylo Znepolski, "Komunizmit—miasto na pamet bez obshtoprieta oporna tochka," in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 128–29.

¹³ Jean-Marc Tétaz, "Kolektivnata pamet—edna filosofksa zagadka," in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 64.

¹⁴ Reinhart Koselleck, "Sishtestvuva li kolektivna pamet," in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheto*, ed. Ivaylo Znepolski (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 44. This quote, from Bulgarian, comes from a German-delivered lecture by Koselleck in Sofia, shortly before his death.

between 1984 and 1988 and were in their early childhood during the communist period. The students were asked to write an essay telling a story from the socialist period. Three justifiable conditions were put in place:

1. This was an in-class assignment. The students were asked to write the essay during a class in Bulgarian literary history or history of West European fairytales—subjects that obviously had nothing to do with the assignment. The assignment was *ad hoc* and voluntary, which greatly surprised the students. Surprise is not necessarily and invariably an effective methodological tool, but in this case proved useful because the element of surprise opened the “front page” of memory, the first story coming to mind. I was particularly interested in this “front page” content because it would allow conclusions about the most emblematic mental associations of the surveyed students and possibly about the “contents” of communism, evoked to the foreground by the work of memory.

Another reason for telling a story *ex abrupto*, so to speak, was the intention for the “memory front page” to appear in its most authentic form as the process of remembering had to occur in situ. A homework assignment would have corrupted the stories as the respondents would have had more time and opportunity to consult other sources, presenting the memory of others as their own, or “fabricate” a special style, again based on the experience and memory of others. An emblematic example is an excellent case in point.

The only condition under the “I Lived Socialism” project was the respondents’ wish to tell their “personal stories.” Some of the participants were coeval with the participants in our project. Here is a telling example of a “premeditated” memory shared by a twenty-three-year-old female student:

I remember the time when there were Char chocolates, when Coca-Cola was sold at the Gabrovo restaurant, when we’d greedily sink our teeth into a Republika [a chocolate bar] priced at 16 stotinki and relish this strange dessert that stuck to the palate. I remember collecting all issues of *Diga* [a children’s magazine] and going to see *Moonwalker* eighteen times when it was released at the Petir Beron Cinema. I remember how we used to wander around the neighborhood in summer after dark, wearing blue sneakers and funny shorts.... I remember how we used to boil countless jars of *lyutenitsa* [tomato and pepper relish] and how I loved trying the mix from the ladle while it was still hot. I remember how we used to eat cherries astride a branch on the tree, spitting the pits with relish.... I remember how all of us—six people, a dog and two cats, plus a fish tank—lived in a two-room apartment with a living room. My brother and I slept on a bunk bed in the living room and always told each other stories before going to sleep.¹⁵

Despite the first-person grammar and the anaphoric “I remember,” any scholar of contemporary Bulgarian literature will easily recognize the obvious influence of one of the project’s initiators—Georgi Gospodinov, one of the most popular Bulgarian writers and poets who has been widely translated and

¹⁵ Konstantina Dacheva, “Detstvo moe,” in *Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii*, eds. Georgi Gospodinov et al. (Plovdiv: Zhanet-45, 2006), 327.

published internationally. One instantly sees Gospodinov's syntactic "trade-mark," the melancholies of his enumerations, even some emblematic details like the *lyutenitsa*, the climbing on a cherry tree, or the younger brother, typical of his poetry and his popular novel *Natural Novel* (*Estestven Roman*, 1999). In short, one can never be sure what and whose formats, experiences, and memories a young respondent would include in the narrative, if they had time to prepare their story in advance. By contrast, because the assignment used in our experiment was immediate, no public discursive formats, literary or historiographical, can be found in any of our respondents' stories. Their stories contain no elements of a sophisticated, socially and stylistically recognizable discourse that may be identified as consciously or unconsciously "borrowed" by the respondents. A precarious conclusion would be that the students have no "exemplary" matrix of discourse about the period that has become routine and sufficiently established to automatically activate—in a situation requiring sudden remembering and writing down—their own discourses in the form of a linguistic and stylistic paradigm, or a structured social format of language.

2. The second condition of the assignment was that the students had full freedom to choose the meaning of the term "story": a historical event they knew about from books or the media, or an everyday event from their childhood or family history. The first suggestion (writing about a historical event) almost sparked a rebellion—many students spontaneously declared that they could not identify any historical event from the socialist period. Several honestly admitted that they could not identify the period at all, and asked about its time frame. At this point I introduced the 1944–1989 period, which calmed the audience for the moment but ultimately proved of no particular use as a point of reference in their writings. We assumed it was important to see what type of narrative the students would associate with the term "story" and whether it would correspond to the "socialist period" time frame specified in the assignment.

3. The third condition asked the respondents to identify, if possible, the source of their story: history textbooks, family tales, literature, arts, the media, anything. Although the students could not clearly identify the period, all could clearly and easily identify the source. This allowed us to identify the sources that implant memory in the minds of people who were not socialized under socialism, and achieve one of the key research objectives: mapping these sources.

The conditions of the assignment were designed to facilitate our methodological justification of the relevance of the study. In his concept of collective memory, Halbwachs assumes that childhood memories do not fully correspond to the term "memory" as children's senses are merely reflections of external objects, without involving any image or thought that connects the child with the people and groups surrounding him/her.¹⁶ Childhood memory then (and the

¹⁶ Halbwachs, *Kolektivnata pamet*, 50.

respondents' memories of communism) is not social and collective memory. Therefore any attempt to seek an image of a social, historical, or collective event, such as the communist regime in Bulgaria (1944–1989), in childhood memory is open to serious criticism.

In his essay "Collective Memory and Historical Memory," Halbwachs introduces another concept he does not elaborate: *mémoire empruntée*, meaning "a baggage load of historical remembrances that I can increase through conversation and reading."¹⁷ In this chapter I will place special emphasis on this concept and will consistently refer to it as "loan memory" because of the obvious social foreignness and otherness of its social sources and contents; it may prove adequate in analyzing narratives of events written by people who could not have been mature witnesses, as is the case of our respondents. Halbwachs, however, only mentions it in passing, without including it in his general scheme, and I will venture to expand its meaning because his exemplification completely excludes the life experience of a possible living witness. This secondary loan memory not only enables, but also incites interpretation of its social sources, the "collective conditions that make memories possible," to reiterate Reinhart Koselleck's criticism of "collective memory": "What political and social content they will eventually be filled with is an entirely different matter." Our preliminary project efforts, and especially our decision to allow the respondents to choose the content and scope of their "stories," aimed at analyzing precisely those "collective conditions," as well as mapping the various sources of the respondents' loan memory about communism. That we are surveying respondents who have little, if any, personal experience and socially formatted memories from the period offers ways to reconcile the inherent contradictions of "collective memory": their personal memories and the "collective conditions which make memories possible" are bound to intersect.

Narrative Components, Narrative Inconsistency, Missing Vocabulary

Although Halbwachs is very interested in the contrast between personal memory and social (collective) memory, his own example points to their reflexive interplay:

I remember Reims because I lived there a whole year. But I also remember that Joan of Arc consecrated Charles VII there, because I have heard it said or read it. The story of Joan of Arc has been presented so often on the stage, on the movie screen, or elsewhere that I truly have no difficulty in imagining Joan of Arc at Reims. Meanwhile, I certainly know that I was not a

¹⁷ Idem, *The Collective Memory* (New York: Harper & Row, 1980), 51.

witness to the event itself, that I cannot go beyond these word heard or read by me, that these symbols passed down through time are all that comes to me from the past.¹⁸

I use this example as a matrix consisting of three building blocks that are also the contexts of the narrative: personal experience ("I remember because I lived"); loan memory ("Joan of Arc... I have heard or I have read"; but unlike Halbwachs I am very much interested in the different social sources of loan memory); and the reflexive act ("I know perfectly well..."), different from the other two aspects but defining their place and time in memory, making them consciously conformable. A main focus of interest should be the very presence or absence of some of these building blocks, and how that shapes the narrative. Their absence may become an argument for the respondents' refusal to complete the assignment: "I have no memories from the communist period" and "I can't remember anything that can make a story" reveals the absence of different building blocks of memory. The former indicates the absence of personal (but socially formatted) memories; the latter—the absence of narrative content in loan memory.

Halbwachs's major opposition between history and memory appears where history and memory cross paths at the narrative level, forcing the respondent to arrange them reflexively in a possible narrative coherence. A single essay in our study contained all three building blocks/contexts in a truly coherent story, written by the only student born in 1969, about her attendance of a high school military training camp at the time of the Chernobyl accident.

Especially curious are two personal childhood memories directly associating the personal with the political context: the coincidence of the child's birthday with official public holidays. A student born on 9 September¹⁹ 1986 remembered her mother's recollection of how, after the political changes in 1989, the girl asked: "*Will I ever have a birthday again?*" The "natural" coincidence of the personal and the historical date brings together the two different contexts in the narrative. This is the second story:

I was born on 1 May 1981. What I remember clearly from that time are my birthdays, because they coincided with a national holiday, a very socialist holiday. Every 1st of May, there was a parade and I always went there with my grandfather. He was a partisan and he fought in the Second World War... Today he is ninety-three and we always celebrate May Day together with my birthday... Every year on the 1st of May there was a parade—countless people would walk in the streets, carrying flowers and flags. We were honoring those who worked and created, because back then creating something was still a supreme value. Most people I know don't like talking about that time. I am sure, however, that there's something good even in the worst thing.

¹⁸ Ibid., 52.

¹⁹ This date (9 September) is the anniversary of the day the communist regime came to power in Bulgaria in 1944. It was celebrated as a big national holiday throughout the communist period until 1989.

Interestingly, the two stories sharing the same personal, yet publicly tinted memory, reach different political judgments about the period. The first seems a happy ending in the respondent's present-day reflection: the little girl is reassured by her parents that 9 September will always be the biggest holiday in their family because it is the date their child was born; the political context is painlessly excluded and the date preserves its value. The second story is typically nostalgic in the respondent's present-day reflection: for the grandfather and his granddaughter, the 1st of May remains a double holiday celebrating a personal birthday and public values they call "socialist."

These stories, however, are an exception. Where the respondents described personal childhood stories, their accounts lacked (as Halbwachs would say) any collective social framework and political references. There were stories about a walk in the park and a broken pram; about a good grandfather who cared very much about his granddaughter; about going to the marketplace for watermelons; about a little girl who got lost on the beach and was eventually found by her parents. Our hypothesis is that consistent narratives about the socialist period appear where the source of the story is not personal; and loan memory, i.e., the "I have heard or I have read" component, is the main and "natural" source of narratives for our young respondents. This will be discussed in greater detail below. The absence of political references and reflections is typical in cases of a missing first-person form where the sources of loan memory are family tales and the term "socialism" provides an empty frame. An emblematic essay consisting of two sentences says: "My father and my mother married during socialism. The soccer team of Botev Plovdiv met FC Bayern Munich and won at the time of socialism; I know this from my father."

The absence of political and historical references, especially in personal memories, is perfectly normal and predictable, considering the respondents' age. Along with the biographical argument there is another obvious reason for such absence or hesitance even in narratives based on loan memory: the evident lack of clarity in most accounts about the meaning and content of the terms "socialism" and "communism." The research team phrased the assignment "write a story from the socialist period" and explicitly chose the word "socialist" in order to trace the respondents' conscious or instinctive uses of the terms "socialism" and "communism."²⁰ The preliminary explanation of the assign-

²⁰ The term "socialism" in the wording of the assignment was suggested to me by the Bulgarian sociological group in the international research project on "Remembering Communism." This would enable not only tracing its use or replacement with "communism" by the respondents but also making conclusions and studies outside the context of the specific assignment. The constellation of terms proved to be very interesting from a comparative point of view, too—during a discussion under the project at a conference in Berlin in 2007, the Romanian researchers were very surprised that the term "socialism" was still used in Bulgaria, pointing out that the only term used to refer to this period in Romania today is "communism."

ment contained no reference to these terms because we wanted to capture the spontaneous designation of the period. Our interest in tracing the respondents' intuitive uses and preferences was provoked by the equally intuitive and inconsistent use of these terms in the present-day public discourses about the period, including in the specialized discourses of human and social sciences (with rare exceptions).²¹ Their content, references, and uses will apparently inspire future studies. The sociolectal stylistic derivatives of the term "socialism" have similarly escaped in-depth analysis. Intellectuals from the middle and the younger generations now use the term *sotz* (a contracted form of "socialism" as pronounced in Bulgarian) as a distanced and pejorative term for the period, notably its stylistic features and sensory associations; some examples are "we had tried the *sotz*, we knew its taste, its smell to some extent"²²—or the now popular phrase "happy *sotz*" referring primarily to architecture or interiors of public buildings.

The young respondents clearly ignored this sophisticated sociolectal vocabulary. Very few used the word "socialism" in their texts, or "communism" as the more customary term to refer to the ideology. Since there are no comments on their choice, the uses seem quite arbitrary, as if the respondents' choice depended only on their momentary attention to the possible implications of the title. The majority preferred to use nonterminological, more domestic expressions like "*bai* Tosho's time," "at that time" or "when I was little," depriving the period of any political connotations and historical references. This corroborates the repeatedly admitted ignorance about the relevance of any use whatsoever: "To be honest, I don't know if this story is from [the time of] socialism. We had got together.... At one point we began arguing about which time was better, theirs or ours, i.e., communism or democracy. I don't remember us mentioning socialism" and "I've heard it from different people, but I don't know if it's right and if we're talking about communism or socialism."

In another essay ("when certain people investigated his family and found out that they weren't communists, work mysteriously disappeared") the respondent has added, just in case, the word "socialists" in brackets above the word "communists." Bracketed self-confessions of ignorance are quite common: "My grandmother's brother was a communist (I have no idea what this really means)"; "I've heard from my parents many stories about Corecom²³ (I don't even know how to spell it)." The adjective happens to be mistaken in several cases, with "a social regime" or "a social writer" instead of "socialist."

²¹ One such reflexive exception is, for example, Daniela Koleva's note: "In this text I use the term 'communist' to characterize the regime, and 'socialism' to refer to the realities of everyday life" (Koleva, *Vîrkhu khrastite ne padat mîlnii*, 20).

²² Gospodinov, *Spomenite ni in Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 lichni istorii*, eds. Georgi Gospodinov et al. (Plovdiv: Zhanet-45, 2006), 11.

²³ A chain of hard-currency shops in communist Bulgaria that sold otherwise unobtainable Western goods.

Vocabulary problems were real: none of the students managed to spell “Komsomol” correctly (it regularly appeared as “Konsumol”). The blue and red silk scarves of the Chavdar and Pioneer children’s uniforms²⁴ became “shawls”; the cards given by in-house trade unions to employees for a discount holiday at the seaside were called “ration cards”; and the Chavdar and Pioneer children’s communist organizations were mistaken for “committees.”

The majority of our young respondents were confused not only about the general and conceptual terms “socialism” or “communism” referring to the 1944–1989 period in Bulgaria, but also about the everyday and political vocabulary of the period that apparently disappeared together with the realities it described. Language is a frequent, consistent, and distinct problem throughout the accounts even in personal biographical memory, where it functions almost as “collective memory,” plotting a recurrent storyline in the essays. The students remembered how at some point in kindergarten they were told not to address their teacher as “Comrade” anymore but as “Mrs.” The memory of this change, however, did not lead to more general reflections on the social vocabulary before and after 1989.

Loan Memory: Sources and Contents

It is time to reapproach the key issue: How do 159 texts by students born shortly before the fall of the regime recollect the 1944–1989 period in Bulgaria? What are the sources and contents of their memory of the period? Their personal biographical memory has trouble associating communism with any public or political signs that can make the regime identifiable, with some rare and random exceptions to the rule. The overwhelming majority draws on loan memory-stories and judgments acquired and inherited from family tales, the media, and various publications. These sources of loan memory are not equivalent. Unlike Halbwachs, who puts an indifferent equalizing “or” in his expressions “by intercourse *or* reading” and “I have heard *or* I have read,” the things heard and read by our respondents do not carry equal weight. Through the immediacy of their discourses and the clear mapping of their sources of memory, the surveyed young people affirmed the categorical priority of family oral stories on their “memory front page” over written accounts, media and institutionalized sources.

For that reason the exploration of their loan memory will once again begin with an exception. What makes the following story exceptional is the conscious connection of an authentic personal childhood memory with sources accessed

²⁴ These are the communist childrens’ organizations from 1944 to 1989. *Chavdarcheta* were children seven to nine years old (wearing blue scarves as a part of their uniform); *pioneri* were children nine to fourteen years old (wearing red scarves as a part of their uniform).

later and, quite untypically indeed, the particular moment in the present which activated and connected these two components into a consistent narrative.²⁵ A narrative dominated by conscious and articulated reflection is a stark exception to the majority of respondent accounts and is therefore provided in full:

"A story from [the time of] socialism reminds me of two things: (1) Khrushchev with a hole in his sock; (2) The diaries of Elena Ceaușescu.... Why am I reminded of this? Well, because I associate them with a recent trip. In France I attended a lecture on the history of communism where the lecturer very naturally and casually declared Khrushchev an "imbecile." Then a Russian woman stood up and replied even more casually: "Don't you realize that by saying this you are still keeping up the Cold War?"

The second association was triggered by a conversation in a cab in London. When the driver heard I was from Bulgaria, he exclaimed: "Ah, Ceaușescu!"

I am aware that these stories are from the present day, but they make me think in a special way about my personal perception of communism. On the one hand, there is a childhood memory in which my grandmother tells me about the shoe-banging Khrushchev, while my sister and I whisper to each other: "What if he had a hole in his sock?" On the other hand, there are slightly later memories of the diaries of Elena Ceaușescu, especially the story of the painted pigs. (Female student at Plovdiv University, born in 1985.)

This text is an exception not just because it employs different sources of memory in a consistent mode, but also because it cites a written source. Merely half a dozen essays make reference to any public sources, chiefly the Internet, which the respondents perceive as the fountainhead of ultimate truth. One female student recalls her history textbook but, for some unknown reason, she is more concerned with what the textbook had to say about the origins of the Bulgars,²⁶ not about socialism. The ten surveyed students from the Sofia University Faculty of History also refused to cite examples or sources of specialized knowledge, or engage in reflections about institutionalized sources on socialism. Below is an illuminating example.

The "revival process"²⁷ in the 1980s is one of the few consensual sites of present-day memory; its legitimate public evaluation today is entirely negative.

²⁵ Good spelling is another exceptional quality of this essay, setting it apart from the majority of the texts.

²⁶ "I found it paradoxical how a completely savage nomadic tribe, which knew nothing but to ride horses and drink mare's milk, could begin building cities, especially a new state as soon as it had 'created' the Bulgarian state." Original quotation from the paper of a female student.

²⁷ The conventional term in contemporary English-language literature is the "revival process" and I feel compelled to use this widely accepted name. Still, I find it necessary to note that "Revival" is the term for the Bulgarian nineteenth century, a time of struggle for an independent Bulgarian Church, culture, education, economic development, and the national liberation movement against Ottoman rule. The communist regime cynically appropriated the term in order to legalize, through its inherited value, actions against human rights and political aggression against identity in the 1980s. Today, however, the term must not be used uncritically, especially in historiographical analyses.

The forced name-changing campaign directed at Bulgaria's Turkish population and the domestic and international outcry against it accelerated the fall of the communist regime in 1989. This is the introduction to the topic in a contemporary history textbook: "Serious political tensions in the country were caused by the so-called revival process at the end of 1984 and the beginning of 1985, associated with the forced name changing of the Turkish population in Bulgaria numbering approximately 850,000 people."²⁸ A history student born in 1985 wrote the following account without offering any comparison, reflection on the different versions, or specialized commentary:

An elderly person I know has told me the true reasons that led to the revival process, reasons covered up today by the official authorities. The main reason was the demand of the Bulgarian Turks to cut off present-day Dobroudzha from Bulgaria and create a state there with a capital in Varna. He also told me about the terrorist attacks at the railway stations in Bunovo, Plovdiv, and elsewhere. Many innocent people died there. I know this from an acquaintance of mine who is fifty-five years old.

Among other things, this essay shows loan memory as the dominant source even for future experts in history. It is not in the existing public discourses of the media, institutions or specialized sources, documents or archives. For the majority of the students, the main source of loan memory was family history and oral stories from parents, relatives, and acquaintances. A public fact and a personal story are combined in the essay of a female student born in 1986 solely through the principle of mechanical enumeration. The source of the first paragraph is not specified and there is no common context or reflection on the possibility of context:

(1) The murder of Georgi Markov in London. He was murdered with an umbrella, and his murder was allegedly ordered by the communist regime in Bulgaria. Georgi Markov was a writer and although the perpetrator of his murder has not been found to the present day, he is considered a victim of Todor Zhivkov's regime. (2) I know from my father that back at the time, he once went to the seaside wearing some sort of a wig. The then authorities arrested and accused him of being a spy because wearing wigs was prohibited.

Another characteristic feature of the essays was that the students could not clearly identify the required historical period. Before they began writing they were told explicitly that the time frame was between 1944 and 1989, but most found it very difficult to place their stories correctly (only the students at the History Department got it right). Several curious texts have an adequate time frame but the link between the contents and the term is problematic: for example, the statement that John Paul II became a pope during the socialist period. Many stories, especially those recounted by grandparents, begin in a context before the

²⁸ Vasil Giuzelev et al., *Istoriia i tsivilizatsiia za 11. klas* (Sofia: Prosveta, 2001), 288.

Second World War. Most stories cannot identify the end of the period; there is consistent confusion of communist and postcommunist facts. The second mistake understandably stemmed from vague personal memories of early childhood; the first was passed down by an external source. Thus memories which Halbwachs would claim are different—personal memory and loan memory—become very similar in their inability to identify the period. This strange “synonymy” in the function of the different segments of memory—“I have lived...” and “I have heard...”—is caused by the lack of any historical background knowledge to fill the dates with context and content, regulate the differences, and play the role of a reflexive corrector. Ignorance makes them equally irrelevant.

A single essay contains reflexive consideration. A student born in 1986 wrote: “It is a pity but I don’t have memories about any event. I remember the time when there was a bread shortage, but this wasn’t at the time of socialism for sure. There were very long queues, and I think it was winter.” The respondents admit that snippets of knowledge cause great personal surprise and even “cultural shock”: “I was very surprised that my aunt had studied economics of socialism at the university as a compulsory subject.” Another student learned from the Internet that Bulgarian soldiers (as well as Polish and East German ones) had fought in the Vietnam War against the USA:

It was hard to believe that Bulgarian soldiers fought against Americans.... That was a cultural shock to me.... It is hard for a generation which has grown up with Rambo and the films of Steven Seagal to believe that present partners [the USA and Bulgaria] had once been enemies, fighting against each other in a foreign land and for foreign interests.

This type of reflection and its conclusion reveal an appalling extent of ignorance to the point where people are not even aware of their ignorance. One student believed that “literature and other pop culture were banned at the time”; another odd choice of words stated: “This was so for the ordinary people, the so-called middle class.” It is not surprising that entire storylines are based on outright mistakes: “At the time of socialism all people went out in the streets to express their protest”; or “I remember the time when I had a blue scarf [the sign of Chavdar children].... I was really disappointed that I didn’t get the red one, too [the sign of Pioneer children], but there was a simple reason: socialism had come.” (Could it be that these respondents think of the years after 1989 as the socialist period?)

The rare attempts at reflection are fraught with staggering causal errors and misconceptions: “Going to church was banned because people had no right to demonstrate their faith, because equality between people was in force at the time.” Not infrequently the respondents’ thoughts demonstrate a highly questionable capacity for judgment (“During socialism, people shopped with ration cards; I think this is stupid”) as well as a highly questionable moral awareness about “law-abidance.” The essay of a female student born in 1987 was written without a hint of irony: “[T]he good thing about socialism was that people were

equal ... the law was the same for everyone, both for the poor and for the rich (with few exceptions). The bad thing about socialism was that back then the laws were strict and truly had to be respected, unlike now."

Family storytelling appears as a major source of loan memory. Political considerations and a historical background mostly appear where they were spelled out by a voice in the family: for example, in the single coherent story telling the saga of at least three generations after a grandfather was killed in 1946. The same source is found in essays that recount no story but just pronounce statements: "under socialism people were equal" or "under socialism school uniforms were compulsory." Institutional knowledge and family stories prove to be virtually incompatible as sources of loan memory.

The majority of essays relying on family stories related to lifestyle. These are stories about food shortages, clothes, Corecom adventures, and long queues during the socialist period; but also glorious moments, such as the high point in the life of a female student's mother, who once happened to dance in a restaurant with the famous actor Georgi Partsalev. Female students wrote extensively and in minute detail about school uniforms, the permitted length of skirts or hair. They cited their mothers' and grandmothers' stories; only three cited Bulgarian films from the period as the source of their ideas about the communist lifestyle. Five mentioned the student work brigades, and seven said going to church was banned during socialism. Similarly, these stories lack political or social evaluations and considerations, limiting their reflexive insight to the statement that all this seems very strange. Most don't even have a plot and simply retell generalities ("school-children wore uniforms and went on work brigades"). Even the frequently repeated statement that "under socialism/communism people had no choice" referred only to the lack of choice of clothes, commodities, and TV channels.

Avoiding direct use of the term "collective memory," I will claim that the single "collective storyline" in the young respondents' loan memory about the 1944–1989 period is the story of the socialist/communist lifestyle, obviously catapulted in the limelight by the consumerist mindset of recent years. It remains open to further investigation whether parents and relatives, i.e., family history, remember primarily such memories, or they are the only accounts that family memory decides or finds occasions to share at present.

In Lieu of Conclusion

The respondents' ignorance is often justified either by a personal lack of interest or a radical difference from present-day personal life:

"Communism is a time very unfamiliar and foreign to me"; "I've heard about this but nothing specific ... for most people my age it comes as a totally different and unknown world"; "I

don't associate socialism with something specific or with some event. The term 'socialism' doesn't even trigger an association in my mind"; "I don't know whether socialism was good or bad, and I'm not really interested in that."

The lack of historical knowledge means that the official memory has been switched off. Educational institutions, history textbooks, teachers' voices are not mentioned as a source of loan memory, as if nowadays Bulgarian high schools do not teach the period at all. Family history as the dominant content of loan memory was exposed by a female student born in 1987, who said that during the socialist period people could afford to buy books: "A memory of that time still exists in our home library, quite rich thanks to this period." Considering that the entire story consists of this sentence, the library seems to be a family memento rather than a source of loan memory. It is a possession, not a text and domain of information, associations, and judgments.

Halbwachs's equalizing "or" in his reference to the sources of collective memory—"by intercourse *or* reading" and "I have heard *or* I have read"—does not verify the social equality of the sources in our case. The absence of institutionalized, written, and sufficient public resources for the youngest generation's memory of socialism and the predominance of oral family history probably require a commentary of terminology, too. Jan Assmann has proposed that Halbwachs's distinction between "memory," on the one hand, and "history" and "tradition," on the other, should be understood also as a distinction between "communicative memory" and "cultural memory,"²⁹ taxonomizing memory according to its sources and content. This fruitful distinction will substantiate the hypothesis that our respondents born shortly before 1989 have on the "front page" of their memory traces of communicative but not cultural memory. Precisely this predominant, recurrent feature of their memory about communism makes it possible to view these recollections as "collective memory."

This inevitably informs the reflection inscribed in their stories. The vast majority of respondents simply share the evaluations and judgments provided by communicative memory and family history. Their judgments about the 1944–1989 period are not really theirs; they reflect the attitudes of their sources in a mix of criticism and nostalgia where neither has claimed the upper hand. The respondents' fleeting attempts at independent reflection are pared down by flawed algorithms and causalities, factual errors and confused vocabulary. Their inadequate reflection demonstrates most clearly the serious absence of "cultural memory" of communism among the youngest generation: the recurrent "emoticon" imbedded in their stories is their indifference.

²⁹ Jan Assmann, *Kulturkata pamet* (Sofia: Planeta-3, 2001), 62 and *passim*.

12. Talking Memories of the Socialist Age: School, Childhood, Regime

Cătălina Mihalache

In the beginning was the student, and he has never entirely abandoned the adult who succeeded him. Childhood owes to school as much as it owes to family or neighbors, but this banal truth has not been registered in the archives and has not made history. Almost my entire existence has somehow been related to school, in so many ways: as a school student, university student, history teacher, research fellow in the history of education, university lecturer, and, more recently, mother of a future student. It seems to be more of a trap than a creed. The world is certainly wider than a classroom. Yet, each school is a world in itself, which rewards its captives with convincing certitudes and promises.

Given that we unavoidably encounter it in anyone's biography, school seems timeless and inert. It is rather indifferent to what it consumes from everybody's life. But this indifference is not mutual, as one can see from the testimonies of those who recall school experiences. Although the encounter with one's own memories is always incomplete, each narrative defends its credibility by means of the uniqueness of its details, be they real or imaginary. In the memories of the former school students under the communist regime, school does not appear as an impersonal or oppressive routine. Rather, the habits it cultivated played a part in the domestication of the epoch they lived in. How? Each in his/her own way.

Writing the Speaking

My research is based on seven interviews dealing with memories about school. At first sight, these testimonies have much in common with the ones that had already been published or with the autobiographical fragments now circulating on the Internet. I am concerned here with former students or teachers for whom

the main purpose of publication was neither that of attesting a personal qualitative writing style, nor the virulent denouncement of the former regime.¹ Aside from such independent and occasional texts, I am not aware of the existence of any volume of recollections exclusively dedicated to the school during the communist period in Romania. There is, however, an interesting exception: a bilingual volume compiling textual and graphic works by current Romanian students *imagining* what student daily life under communism used to be like. The project constituted, in the words of the organizers, a “little experiment—that is the transposition of the 2008 student into a reality, alien in terms of periods, but familiar in terms of age.”² We could, therefore, assume that there are enough samples of “socialist childhood” circulating in the mass media, on the Internet,³ in literature, in the hawking about family stories⁴ that would enable present-day students to complete their task. Such an exercise of composition sends us, in a very didactic way, into a world of *imagined memories* about the communist regime. Under these circumstances, it seems useful to return to the witnesses, to the memories of those who lived that period for real. The interviews conducted eventually outline in a credible, very detailed manner, what we could call the “school culture”⁵ and the daily life of an epoch.

¹ See for example Eduard Ștraub, *Mărturii peste timp...* (Bacău: Editura Psyhelp, 2000); Constantin Sporea, *Memorii* (Iași: Editura Timpul, 2001); Eliza Diradurian, *Amintiri ale unei profesoare și directoare de la Școala Armeană din București (1950–1955)* (Bucharest: Editura ARARAT, 2002); Lăcrămioara Stoenescu, *Copii—dușmani ai poporului* (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2007). Recollections about the school years appear in the works of oral history: Dan Lungu, *Povestirile vieții. Teorie și documente* (Iași: Editura Universității “Al. I. Cuza,” 2003); Gențiana Baci, Matei Bejenaru, and Dan Lungu, *Tătărași, memoria unui cartier* (Iași: Editura Universității “Al. I. Cuza,” 2007); Muzeul Țăranului Român, *Mărturii orale. Anii '80 și bucureștenii* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 2003).

² Luciana Marioara Jinga, “Argument,” in *Elev în comunism* (Student during the Communist Regime), ed. Luciana Marioara Jinga (Bucharest: Editura Curtea Veche, 2009), 6, 8. The volume contains the best works presented in a competition launched by the Institute for the Investigation of the Communist Crimes in Romania. They collected about 500 works of textual or graphic compositions.

³ The organizers estimated that about 15% of the works were “integrally transcribed from different blogs and sites” (Jinga, “Argument,” 10).

⁴ There were works “entirely written by members of the family, parents or grandparents” and, because of that, guilty of nostalgia. The truth which was wanted by the jury can be deduced from the eulogistic tone reserved for the works mentioning “what was natural” to appear in such prose: complaints about the mass organizations, the school uniforms, the students’ practical training in agriculture, the parades glorifying Ceaușescu’s rule. Such “realities of the student life” also had the quality of directly referring to the gloomy aspects of a tough “daily life” and, hence, to the “criminal nature of the communist regime” (Jinga, “Argument,” 10).

⁵ The term *school culture* generally refers to the beliefs, perceptions, relationships, attitudes, and written and unwritten rules that shape and influence every aspect of how a school functions, but the term also encompasses more concrete issues such as the physical and emotional safety of students, the orderliness of classrooms and public spaces, or the degree to which a school em-

There is a persistent belief that school was one of the most subjugating instruments of communist power, quite effective as an institution of discipline⁶ and ideological indoctrination. At the same time, although it might not seem apparent, school was then, too, a world by itself, with a somehow “opaque” daily existence for the noninitiated, with still little-known functional mechanisms. The interviews can confirm both truths and exemplify the way in which they could complete or abolish each other.

School Discipline, a Précis of the Regime?

In a very obvious manner, the memories of all the people involved were marked by the exercises of school power and the accompanying abuses. One might say that for the former students the “repressive” side of their daily existence was not explicitly related to the “totalitarian regime,” nor to the formal school rules,⁷ but to the anxieties of a certain *modus vivendi*, involving a repeated resort to intimidation, insults and even corporal punishments.

[Once an inspection came and] the whole class learned that lesson by heart. [The teacher said] *I have an inspection⁸ so I'll kill you if you don't answer well...* [At the beginning of the class there was the] notebook checking... The teacher was running through them... [and said]: *What's this spot here? Smack! Why's that page missing? Smack!...* You know the beating we got!... [In the vocational schools, there were pedagogues charged with the special job to keep the order everywhere] and there was a silence and discipline you wouldn't believe... and a cleanness! (O. I.)

braces and celebrates racial, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural diversity. Like the larger social culture, a school culture results from both conscious and unconscious perspectives, values, interactions, and practices, and it is heavily shaped by a school's particular institutional history” (see *The Glossary of Education Reform for Journalists, Parents, and Community Members*, published on <http://www.edglossary.org/school-culture/>, accessed 8 January 2014)

⁶ The school was a very effective instrument in the creation and maintenance of social docility. Through its collective and simultaneous supervision of its subjects, through the system of daily punishments and rewards, through detailed examinations and its hierarchies, it succeeded in modeling an increasing number of individuals in accordance with the demands defined by the church, by the state, and so on. See Michel Foucault, *A supravaghea și a pedepsi. Nașterea închisorii* (București: Humanitas, 1997), 237–41, 250–62.

⁷ Romanian school has a general authoritarian tradition. There are school regulations from the communist period resuming in detail, provisions from the previous period regarding the matriculation number, the salutations, the students' correct sitting position, the desirable conduct outside school, etc. It is, therefore, more interesting to watch the evolution of the individuals' attitude toward these rules than their actual content.

⁸ The inspection was the most important moment in a teacher's life. The inspector had the same authority over a teacher that a teacher had over a student.

In elementary and technical schools, the disciplining of students was much more important than studying and intellectual development. Different ways of conceiving hygiene, eating, resting, and wearing clothing were imposed on the students. Simultaneously, prompt execution of the school regulations and the strict memorization of information were practiced. This modeling effort was more visible in the rural environment or in the urban peripheries. You could, however, come upon such authoritarian formative behavior, accepted or even encouraged by the students' parents, in the prestigious schools as well: "She was considered a more special, a stricter schoolmistress... Parents wanted this... Then the teaching staff had a comparatively large power.⁹ They could call the parents to school, to actually reprimand them, like children, and the parents accepted this inferior position" (A. M.). The family found it quite normal for students to be beaten¹⁰ by their schoolmistress: "[The parents said] *she knows why* [she beats you], *let it be* [so]" (L. B.).

After elementary school, the important character in the student's life was the homeroom teacher, who preserved most of the disciplinary authority of a schoolmistress or of her counterpart in the boarding schools. The engineers and the foremen had a further predisposition to treat students as potential criminals—an otherwise unavoidable attitude in a socialist factory.

In high school, I had a homeroom teacher teaching electrotechnology, very fiery... He kept a tight rein on us.... We were punished in different ways. For instance, ... we were cleaning the classroom ... this took about 4–5 hours. To us it looked enormous, this was our free time. And there were even times when we had to wash the school toilet, for having done I don't know what... And that was one of those moments when the water was cut off, so what should we wash it with? It was winter and we were told: *That's all right, take snow from outside and make it clean, like in a pastry shop, so I could eat a cake here*, our homeroom teacher said to us. (O. P. N.)

Science teachers (sciences were the favored subjects in the socialist school) could also abuse the excessive respect or even fear of their subjects. Mathematics was the "queen" of the curriculum. Physics and chemistry also played a much more important role than they did before and after the 1960s–1980s:

If I could speak of a nightmare, it's from those years, [caused by] the trimester test papers [in mathematics]. It was a real problem, to get a passing average grade or not... Their teaching style was violent... I was self-inhibiting, as I was not as bad [in mathematics] as I am now describing myself... [I had] a physics teacher, who ... reminded me of a Nazi officer... I was always making the sign of the cross with the tongue in my mouth when entering [the physics laboratory]. (A. M.)

We had a very severe mathematics teacher. He would beat us, hit our heads against the blackboard... [Yet] he was an element of attraction for that class. Parents, however, were more confident... because there was a tougher teacher. (L. B.)

⁹ See also Muzeul Țăranului Român, *Mărturii orale*, 326–27.

¹⁰ "Beating in school was a generalized habit" (ibid., 327).

The unpleasant memories did not, however, destroy the generally positive perception of the school of that time.¹¹ Several decades later, people are even able to appreciate the discipline that made them study diligently, although they understand this could never be possible today:

It looked normal to me... You were told some rules, you observed them, there were not many to violate them.¹²... There was that idea of uniformization... No one should break the lines, be different from the others... [To impose] such discipline now, among children would be stressful [for me, as a teacher]... [Yes] there was more discipline... I think that was better [that way, then]. (A. G.)

The overburdening of school life is retrospectively regarded as microheroisms of student life and is not linked to the deficiencies of the socialist system. It makes the school experience all the more memorable, it legitimates professional and social advancement, or it underlines a feeling of superiority vis-à-vis subsequent generations. It is also related to a feeling of competitiveness and competence, which exceeds the strictly educational limits:

I was reading consistently... We were a good class in high school, we were aiming at being ... a top class... Teachers then required a certain knowledge of the student, and they were giving much more correct grades ... it's true that we, maybe out of a certain fear, shame, etc., were learning more, to get above that five, or even six—which was regarded as shameful. (P. O. N.)

Then too, everybody would have wanted to be [admitted] to universities ... the social position was important. When you were *comrade engineer* or *Ms. Doctor*, that made a difference, but the selection was so strict. (O. I.)

The price of advancement was a high one, especially for those who would attend evening school and work at the same time: “[It was] work ... like in convict prisons. I would leave at 6 a.m. and arrive home at 10 p.m. I was sleeping while walking ... I was studying on the bus... I had a 9 blood pressure, so unfed was I” (O. I.). In spite of the efforts required, the evening school—usually a technical one—was still regarded in those years as a good chance for solving one’s political,¹³ social,¹⁴ or economic¹⁵ problems.

¹¹ In an opinion poll made by the Soros Foundation Romania, about 39% of the teen respondents stated that school in the communist period was better than school today. More surprisingly, maybe, about 21% of them considered that school at that time and today’s school are “the same” (see *Implicarea civică și politică a tinerilor* [Constanța: Editura Dobrogea, 2010], 67). 5,861 students from 8th to 12th grade (so aged 14 to 19) were interviewed, from 86 schools selected from all the country’s departments (*ibid.*, 7).

¹² See also Baci, Bejenaru, and Lungu, *Tătărași, memoria unui cartier*, 55.

¹³ This was true especially for the children coming from persecuted political families, as they were not allowed to attend prestigious schools. This interdiction was very strict in the 1950s and was slowly relaxed in the 1960s, but until the end of the regime, admission to universities

The failures, emotions, and efforts required to obtain good results are still very lively in the former students' memory:

My first grade [in school] was a four, in a sort of a test paper, with a hasty dictation, on which, as I was very emotional, I couldn't focus, I couldn't hear or understand ... But this grade was not written down in the register of the class. Subsequently, a serious paper was announced, with real grades, and I got a ten. (A. M.)

I never liked biology. In fifth grade, upon my first encounter with the teacher, the first time he examined me, I got a five ... this was a personal disaster... [For me], biology was erased. (M. L.)

In chemistry, there was a really bad female teacher... My, how she shook us up [with low grades]! And I started to study chemistry [seriously]... [So] when I was examined to increase my average grade, she gave me a nine. (D. M.)

No wonder that for some of them, school has never ended, they are still in the role so intensely lived at that time: "I am still a student studying for all the subjects who doesn't want to be punished" (A. M.).

Self-Glorification, Technicism, Forced Agriculture

The student's existence was amplified by the experience of being a Pioneer—the festive side of student life, marked by special functions, symbols, and rituals. Children then, however, did not feel this phenomenon as a direct political intrusion by the regime. They mainly perceived it as a form of further acknowledgment of school merit or as an entertainment coloring the daily school routine, or, in the worst of the cases, as a waste of time:

Pioneer meant [being] a front-rank student, with excellent grades, with good behavior. (O. I.)

I remember better some festivities related to the pioneers' organization... They were impressive... We were standing, we were singing the anthem... The flag bearer, the drummer entered [the classroom]... I don't remember what formulas were uttered, and, finally, there was a small show. (P. O. N.)

was formally conditioned by a good political and social personal file, thus continuing a tacit warning against the undesirable socialist citizens (see Stoenescu, *Copii—dușmani ai poporului*, 205–6, 226).

¹⁴ At the end of the 1950s, most of the children were hardly attending the seven compulsory years of the "general school," eager to get a paid job as soon as possible. The restrictions of the regime concerned not only the Universities but also the non-vocational secondary schools: 75% of the admitted must come from proletarian rural or urban families. In such a context, the evening school was considered to be the real democratic way of improving one's professional and social status.

¹⁵ Because of the chronic lack of resources of their families, most of the young peasants were coming to town first to be boarded by a technical school or to be hired somewhere in the city, not to study. So, the evening school was for them almost the only way to continue their studies.

Probably because I was a better speaker, they pushed me to be a ... propagandist, something like that, over the Pioneers. And I know I had meetings on Sundays, they sent us to the Pioneers' clubs. We were engaged in *activities*. I was very busy [doing these]. (M. L.)

Since in socialist Romania festivities were by definition dedicated to the party and its leader, students and their teachers were unavoidably involved in the great enactments of homage taking place each year. No one graduated from school at the time without being asked to applaud, strictly speaking, the regime during meetings, shows, demonstrations, or Ceaușescu's visits:

[This] was wasting your summer holiday and your free time, because the preparations took place after classes. (P. O. N.)

They took us to stadiums, for rehearsals... I remember once Ceaușescu came... I know they sent us to give him flowers, dressed us up, checked us, jawed at us... I didn't like it. But I regarded it as some kind of homework. (M. L.)

As a Pioneer, I participated in 23 August parades... It was not nice, but it was not unbearable. The homeroom teacher was calling us, those she thought she could rely on... I was in seventh grade [then]... The car with Ceaușescu passed by.¹⁶ ...There were lots of people, on both sides, with flags, posters... You had to shout "Ceaușescu" [etc.]... That was normal. (A. G.)

But [there was] a competition here too.¹⁷ That was the sports teacher's role. He had to see how you're moving, better or more slowly... I was trying each time to make it look bad ... for [my own] comfort. (L. B.)

Starting with the second half of the 1970s, the school was subjected to a so-called reform, which consisted in the forced extension of the compulsory school period, a drastic cut in humanities to the benefit of technical specialization¹⁸ and the continuous rise of extracurricular assignments—including the direct participation in the country's industrial and agricultural production:

Humanities classes were abolished... [In school] the so-called *specialization subjects* predominated, in which we were making equipment layouts that we didn't have a clue about... Humanities were almost squashed... [The foremen/instructors] were generally tough, rude persons.¹⁹ [But they could be bribed, so] my father would usually intervene. (A. M.)

¹⁶ For this particular event, see also G. Crăciun, *Iași, 12–14 septembrie 1985: Vizita celui mai iubit fiu al poporului. Ficțiune și adevăr* (Iași: Editura Noël, 2006).

¹⁷ "It was a boast for a school to have an artistic program on 23 August and it was a shame not to be part of it ... poor teachers, they were working with the students, until late in the night ... to make it all fine." See Corneliu Dragomir, *Rememorări ale vieții cotidiene din timpul comunismului într-un oraș provincial. Studiu de caz: Drobeta Turnu Severin* (Iași: Editura Lumen, 2009), 111.

¹⁸ In the school year 1989–1990 there were 64,548 students in the nontechnical high schools (most of them specializing in sciences) and 903,868 in the technical ones. See Adrian Miroiu, coord., *Învățământul românesc azi. Studiu de diagnostică* (Iași: Polirom, 1998), 128.

¹⁹ See also Paul Cernat et al., *În căutarea comunismului pierdut* (Pitești: Editura Paralela 45, 2001), 321, 325.

As expected, most people got somehow used to it:

In high school, we were having practical training in factories... Two weeks a trimester, we were going to factories... They were just sending us to help the workers with the rough work... On the whole, we were happy to be out of school... We would group together, near the furnace [in foundries] where it was warm... Those who were better off and had a tape recorder would bring it. We would listen to the latest music: Madonna, Pet Shop Boys, Michael Jackson. (P. O. N.)

But this was not always possible: I think this was the great trauma of my adolescence, that I could not attend a language high school. (A. M.)

The excessive industrialization, redoubled by the collectivization of land, led to the depopulation of the villages and to the degradation of agriculture. To keep the farm production up to reasonable limits, compulsory labor was introduced for school and university students, the military, etc. School was first a way out for the children of peasants dispossessed of their land, but then it became a regular provider of unqualified labor in the state farms:

I was lucky with collectivization, otherwise I was not allowed to go to school [in the city by my parents]... In 1962, when collectivization ended, children started to leave [the village]. In my class, of seventeen [students who] finished [general school], about ten left. (O. I.)

In high school, we started the trimester with about three weeks of agricultural training... We had to go somewhere out of town, at 7.30 [a.m.] ...and we were kept there till we fulfilled the work quota, late in the evening. The activists were yelling at the teachers, the teachers were yelling at us... [It was] very cold. (A. M.)

The work system was disagreeable and not very profitable. In spite of all the disadvantages, city children could find, here too, attractive moments. They were exempted from the usual school program, so they felt somehow on holiday. They could even benefit personally from participating:

The [so-called] *agricultural training*²⁰ was very pleasant... Apples were the best, we didn't get too dirty. They were big, visible, easy to pick. Grapes, though nice [to eat] ... were difficult to pick, sticky... The worst were tomatoes; we had to bend over all the time, to look in the bushes, and we were fighting with tomatoes and got home so dirty... I even envied the students in the agricultural school, who were exempted from school each fall for about three weeks; They were brought farther, boarded [there] ... and at the end of each workday, they held a dance ... away from the parents' and society's control. (P. O. N.)

A Normal Childhood in Spite of Communism

The students of the "Golden Age" lived the difficulties of that time less dramatically than their parents did. They had their own world. There is no wonder that for some of them, those school years—the years of childhood and adoles-

²⁰ See also Muzeul Țăranului Român, *Mărturii orale*, 261–64, 365.

cence—are still the most beautiful years of their lives. Between the children of that time and the rigors of the communist regime there were several “protection screens.” The adults themselves tried to protect their private life as much as possible from public intrusions and, furthermore, to provide a better life for their children. The school routine often diluted the aggressiveness of the public message, and the young people were building, just like today, their own social circles, immune to institutional constrictions:

I do feel nostalgia [for the school years], because, indeed, I had many friends... The universe of those children was totally different from the rest of the world in which society was living... We were taking shelter in some very nice childhood games. (P. O. N.)

Having a rather united family, this was somehow enough for me ... including what we call today *entertainment*, ‘cause there were parties, dancing ones too... I liked it very much where I was. (A. M.)

Holidays were a much expected moment, both because we could do lots of things, the kids in town, and because we would go to the countryside and I would play with my [numerous] cousins... We did lots of crazy things together (P. O. N.)

The 1980s crisis had unexpected pleasant outcomes for the children of that time: families were gathering around the few sources of light and warmth; the little ones had new access to the adults’ world (like listening to forbidden radio channels); the power outages could prolong the playtime, just as did standing in lines. For them, the lack of basic resources (food, warmth, clothes) was not as tragic as it was for their parents, who grew up under much rougher conditions, in the 1950s. They were not entirely aware of that crisis. They would just consume what they were given.

School, like any other institution of those years, normalized the crisis by reducing the work program and making the cold, the lack of electrical power, of water, etc., acceptable. Only the unpredictable was harder to administrate, endangering school habits and authority: “They were cutting off the electrical power, right in the middle of the trimester test papers and once there was a hullabaloo, during the physics class, someone shot some kind of spray at the teacher in the dark... Funny” (P. O. N.).

Though the shortages of those years made the “student job” more difficult to handle, the children persevered, accomplishing their duties, just like everybody around them:

[I still remember] the classes [in school] which had been shortened to 35 minutes [instead of 50] ... especially in winter ... so that they could close the school at about 5 p.m. When I got home, the lights in the streets were already turned off ... to the joy of the children, who were still outside. What was there to do in the house?... But ... in seventh and eighth grades, we wouldn’t stay out, [as] we felt the examinations approaching. (L. B.)

These are the images I’ll keep in my mind forever: I would come back home in the evenings. I had to do my homework for the next day, but there was no power. The radiators were cold so I would sit with my coat and gloves on, doing my homework by candlelight. (P. O. N.)

The material deficits were exacerbated by abuse of eulogistic words and images, which invaded the everyday life. For the children, the rejection of communist propaganda—when it existed—was just another game to play:

The halls of our high school were ... full of the pictures of the Comrade [Ceașescu], from different foreign visits... We were playing, drawing big ears on Kim Il-sung, painting big noses on I don't know what African leader... It was a defiant gesture, but also a rejection of the official ideology, because in some childish way ... we didn't like it, we felt a certain pressure... It tired us out. Of course, there were investigations: *Who drew ears on Kim Il-sung? Who drew a beard on Ceașescu?* No one knew anything; we were covering for each other... [The investigations] had no end. (P. O. N.)

In fact, the political propaganda in school depended a lot on one's personal fervor. The misguided zeal was rather rare²¹ but all the more memorable:

We had to know by heart the Communist Party's holidays. These were displayed on a wall... and [the schoolmistress] would interrupt the mathematics class or the Romanian class all of a sudden, asking: *What happens on January 6th? What's happens on January 7th?*... [If] you didn't know, you would get a thrashing. (L. B.)

Paradoxically, even those who were obliged to do it by virtue of their profession, could prove to be more moderate than the "volunteers." The [schoolmistress's] husband was an activist ... paid for that. But ... he was not excessive. I mean, he was a civil servant ... no abuses. He didn't put pressure on people. He was treating this political thing just as such, like any job. (L. B.)

Although the school's mission was to train the *new man* of the regime, the socialist *new school* was sufficiently inert to perpetuate the classical model of academic instruction unaltered by "political education": "It all looked like theater to me... We had to write down all kinds of stupid things... We were not tested on that, though. So you could clearly see it was just something that had to be done in order to be done, not some serious stuff, like math, physics" (A. G.).

The teachers' efforts at politicization were so superficial, that even the students holding different functions in the Pioneers' organization did not understand much of the wooden language of the regime: "I remember I couldn't understand what the party wanted to say" (M. L.). No wonder that most of the students managed to ignore the propaganda all around them: "In general ... the things related to the official ideology of the state and the party ... didn't touch us, we didn't pay it much attention; we had other things on our minds [friends, entertainment, school]" (P. O. N.).

But what fitted more the traditional functions of school was the exercise of a certain social, extracurricular control over school staff, the students and their

²¹ "Still, I had decent teachers, the poor guys were doing their political duties only superficially and sometimes even reluctantly" (Cernat et al., *În căutarea comunismului pierdut*, 311).

families. Bans are always easier to apply than any kind of new and desirable conduct. Here too, the personal zeal could play a very important role:

On Easter ... I went to church in the morning for Good Friday communion and I got to school in time, but others were late. [The schoolmistress asked] *Where have you been?* They said: *To church...* [The schoolmistress rebuked them.] *If Comrade Principal finds out, she will expel you. What are you looking for, in the church?...* I told this story to my students ... in 2000, and they didn't understand... *How's that possible, to be rebuked for going to church?*²² (L. B.)

Still, children's complicity with their family could neutralize such acts as well: "I knew, for instance that I could go to church, but I was not supposed to talk about it. Or, to pray with my grandmother [but not tell anyone else]" (M. L.). "One of my grandparents' habits [was to] listen to Voice of America... [I was listening, too.] I just knew from my family that I shouldn't speak about it with the other kids" (A. M.).

In its turn, school was controlled by the great repressive institutions of the regime (the party, the Securitate). But their presence was not typically visible to the students, unless under exceptional circumstances:

On 16 or 17 December [1989], [there was] a big assembly in the high school library room... Some schoolmates had written some graffiti in the city... They were discovered, they were seized... The Securitate came... They were interested in whether we were listening to foreign radio channels.²³... They started with: *Isn't it true that you do not actually want to listen to foreign radio channels, but there is that Mircea Crișan at Voice of America, who tells some great jokes?!* And he even said a joke or two... The idea was that you admitted you were listening to Voice of America. Nothing. *Aaa, that's not possible! But the [sports] commentary on BBC?...* [And] *on what do you listen to music?...* He even said *What about Radio Vatican? You listen to it because of the services, but you don't [really] want to, do you?...* I was scared to hell ... cause I was afraid not that someone might tell on me, but that he could fall into [this] trap and say, *Yes, I'm listening.* (L. B.)

Without being underground fighters or dissidents, children were not easy to fool, because they had already learned what they were supposed to do. Protected by their age, they could mock both the official and the informal bans, treating with equal detachment any form of authority: "As children, we were going to church to have fun, to set some grannies' skirts on fire with candles ... or to have a beer that evening... It seemed like a show to us, the Resurrection night" (P. O. N).

After all, their public involvement was far from the one the authorities aimed at, and the participation in supporting or in denying the communist regime, as far as it went, did not probably exceed a simple exercise in socialization, in mimicking adults, or in mild acts of sabotage.

²² Concerning the attitude toward the church, see also Muzeul Țăranului Român, *Mărturii orale*, 264–66.

²³ See also *ibid.*, 150–51.

1989: Communism Goes, School Continues

Romanians were not ready for the historic events when they happen, and Romanian children even less so. For the children, it was the usual winter holidays:

I was queuing for meat, someone brought a radio. [You could hear on the radio] that the dictator left... But everybody stood there... And everyone was saying to each other to shut up, to stay there, in line, quiet... And after that, they started to come, workers out of the factories, others, at the city hall... My mother was out [in the yard] ... and the workers told her *Come on lady, come with us, or aren't you hungry?*" (M. L.)

Just as today, young people were aware only of the history written in their textbooks:

The day of 22 December [1989] caught me reading from the eleventh-grade history textbook, the lesson on the 1848 Revolution... I [still] remember that [coincidence]. (A. M.)

But the excitement of the people around convinced them that they were living a truly memorable moment. On 22 [December 1989] a neighbor came ... and said, *Quick, turn on the TV! ... See how they overthrew Ceaușescu!*... [Then] I went out in the street and ... I saw a car or two speeding up and the people in the cars were yelling something, that Ceaușescu was down... From an apartment building, somewhere, somebody threw a Ceaușescu portrait. And it broke, in the street... I was thinking: *that's a very important thing, what is going on here...* I felt the change... I felt a kind of joy. (A. G.)

Children participated, then too, in the family's problems: "I had relatives in Timișoara... The communication was cut... [Father and sister were left there] and my family was very scared, they didn't know what might happen to them... Mother was listening in the night to [the radio channel] *România Liberă* (Free Romania)²⁴ and I was listening with her... We were [so] scared" (M. L.). But they did not always understand the fears around them: "Mother started exaggerating. She was thinking of what we should do, of going down in the basement, in case *God forbid*, something [bad] would happen... There were rumors about the water [that it was poisoned]" (M. L.). "I was in the countryside ... on 22 [December 1989] ... and I went out, yelling... *Ceaușescu's down! Communism is down!*... [And] my grandma said: *Don't be so happy, dear, the war will start, the Russians will come [to attack us].*" (L. B.)

After Ceaușescu fell, the local school "dictatorships" perished as well, not necessarily due to political criteria:

The regime's fall brought forth a relaxation in the relationships with teachers, an obvious one. [The tough mathematics teacher] abandoned us... For us, it was a release. The second and third trimesters [of that year] were maybe the only [periods] of [a pleasant] adolescence I had... The special [technical] subjects disappeared [and] other physics and mathematics teachers appeared. (A. M.)

²⁴ Confusion: this is about Radio Free Europe. *România liberă* is a post-1989 popular newspaper.

Students unexpectedly received, rather formally, certain decision-making powers in school. They could participate, for instance, in the “democratic elections” of the new principals. But they wanted something else: “[We thought that because of the Revolution] we could get rid of everything we were afraid of [in the school]” (M. L.). As public disobedience had proved to be a success formula, they even tried some little riots of their own: “There were classes when the pupils locked themselves in the room, asking for different teachers. I know there were protests like that in the school,²⁵ but of course, nothing happened” (L. B.).

The school was affected by the tensions and confusions of those days: “After the Revolution, there was a denial of authority [especially in the case of those who had been too active supporters of the regime]... We [the students] were thinking, *It’s so good the Revolution came, we won’t study physics with [our] teacher any more...* [but he kept his] authority and reputation without a problem” (M. L.). This attitude brought about really odd changes in leadership: “[After 1989], the great Revolution [for us] ... was to elect as a principal the [former] party secretary of the school [though he was teaching the most politicized subjects]. He was an absolutely OK guy, and at that time he was enjoying ... the greatest popularity [in school]” (L. B.).

Memory: Plots, Ages, Uses

Running through these personal memories, we can first notice that the interviewees did not make a clear distinction between childhood, the “profession” of student, and the “communist regime.” Precisely because of the apparent confusion between these sides of their existence, the evocation of their lives at that time is much more credible. The authenticity of the recollection is confirmed by the very unique way in which each individual recomposed a personal history, able to be integrated into a common past.

In the actual functioning of the interlocutors’ memory, the invoked sequences had a great fluidity and associative power, in respect to particular memorization reference points, known exclusively by the individuals in question. Thus, a person did not necessarily associate the calendar of political holidays with the exaggerations of a totalitarian regime, but with the beating the

²⁵ Here is another memory about these protests, from the standpoint of a teacher, formerly general school inspector in Bucharest: “The child realized he had certain power, that he might even replace the teachers he didn’t like. There were small demonstrations, in 1990–1991, when they were protesting in the halls or outside the school against a certain teacher they didn’t want, or they were writing on the walls... And they succeeded. And the fact that they succeeded in replacing teachers gave them a feeling of power and freedom.” See Muzeul Țăranului Român, *Mărturii orale. Anii ’90 și bucureștenii* (Bucharest: Editura Paideia, 2008), 340.

students were getting from the schoolmistress, when they did not promptly reproduce the required information. Many episodes from the 1980s crisis were scattered in other recollection clusters related to the examinations, to the student's fears on his way back home, or to the childish joy of finding empty Coca-Cola bottles on an international train. Also, a major public event was remembered as an extension of a private matter, and the Revolution of December 1989 was fixed in memory as the day when a child was studying a certain lesson, listening to the radio with the grandparents, or waiting for news from the family.

The interlocutors represent two distinct generations. The different background of the two generations—the parents coming, in most of the cases, from the rural area, and the children, without exception, from the urban one—also reflects a cultural differentiation. The parents' memories were clearly built upon the idea of effort, of willpower, of physical exhaustion, while the children's memories insist particularly on successfully meeting the school requirements, on competition and self-assertion.

The representation of school is, again, different for both generations from the standpoint of the formative message. For the students of the 1950s–1960s, school essentially meant a continuous memorization effort, of larger and larger amounts of information. The students of the 1980s were beyond the mere memorization and reproduction. Very early, they were led to the additional readings area, practicing a much more complex and creative studying style. Maybe for this reason, too, for the parents school was a kind of ordeal, while for their children it became a destiny, extended in their present professions.

This studious younger generation felt more acutely the constrictions, the abuses of authority and the disciplining power of the school. Many of their emotional responses are stimulated by these disproportionate power relations, which left them unpleasant or even painful memories, much more substantial ones than the way in which they felt the explicit political restrictions of the regime.

Yet, some of the interviewees insisted on presenting their memories of “communism and ideology” (P. O. N.) more precisely of what they considered to be “somewhere on the edge between school and communism” (L. B.). Their negative, politicized reading key is, obviously, a retrospective and bookish exercise of finding relevance in the post- and anticommunist discourse. But the stories they told in this category—Kim Il-sung's big ears, or the punishing of those who did not know the party's celebrations—are only accidentally related to communist ideology in terms of content. Rather, they are more symptomatic of attitudes toward an old authoritarian school tradition, which has always provoked oppositional reactions from the students. The communist propaganda seemed to have been rather a pretext to burden teachers' and students' jobs with something that “had to be done, in order to be done” (A. G.) without deeply modifying the hierarchy of school values and the power of the authorities.

Thus, we can observe in these interviews an almost completely apolitical memory, devoted to private life and to small communities made up of family members, neighbors, or classmates. This might be related to a way of life, widely shared by almost all of the students' acquaintances at that time. Living within such microcommunities was the rule of surviving and eventually prospering during those years. It was the most common way to diminish or to avoid the pressures of the regime. These microcommunities—including those generated by the school—shaped the identity and the memories of the young ones, making their subsequent recollections so coherent and so relevant for an entire generation. The historical and public past remains, in these stories, a common, apparently insipid time, requiring a special effort of investigation and redefinition. In this past, the coercive, punitive, visible political intrusion was not lacking, but seems to have been somehow exterior and accidental.

The main historical question is: To what extent these interviews give us an accurate idea of the reality of the communist period? In any case, they provide a rich picture of the interviewees' perception of a past reality. Retelling their old stories or composing answers to new questions about the past, they could have also expressed their subsequent desire to solve retrospectively the anomalies they saw in their lives under communism.

Apart from their relevance to the individual, these autobiographical sequences offer us access to a *collected memory* of the communist age, rather than to a *collective one*.²⁶ More precisely, they are significant pieces of the collective memories circulating in limited, local, generational, informal networks of socialization—safe places where people feel free to talk about themselves and to affirm their identities, including those of the former socialist students.

List of Interviewees

- M. L.—female, 32, born in Fălticeni (Suceava County); higher education in marketing
- A. G.—female, 36, born in Sibiu, lived in Iași (Iași County) in early childhood; higher education in foreign languages
- L. B.—male, 35, born in Roman (Neamț County); higher education in history and law
- A. M.—male, 36, born in Botoșani (Botoșani County); higher education in history

²⁶ “A collected memory is an aggregate of individual memories,” while “collective memories originate from shared communications about the meaning of the past.” See Wulf Kansteiner, “Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies,” *History and Theory* 41 (2002): 186, 188.

- P. O. N.—male, 39, born in Tecuci (Galați County); higher education in history and foreign relations
- O. I.—female, 60, born in the village of Cârniceni (Iași County); secondary education in chemistry
- D. M.—male, 67, born in the village of Tulbureni (Botoșani County), today part of the city of Botoșani; secondary education in bookkeeping

Translation by Evagrina Dîrțu

13. Within (and Without) the “Stem Cell” of Socialist Society

Anny Kirilova

Adoption is a sore subject, much discussed and debated in present-day Bulgaria. Under socialism, it was a state policy, not subject to public deliberation. Until a decade ago, the ethnological interpretation of adoption was limited to traditional societal norms and perceptions. It was my personal involvement in this process, as well as the lack of serious sociological studies on the socialist period, that engaged my scholarly interest to the topic.

Adoption is intrinsic to the Bulgarian cultural system both in memory and in its present form and represents a relatively autonomous module. Participants, enacting procedures, and consequences place adoption in the realm of the particular, nonstandard case, socially different from the common norm. The practices of traditional society and the vehement discussions and changes after 1989 outline the temporal dimensions in the evolution of adoption as an institution. The pivotal and central place between these two boundaries belongs to the socialist period, which saw the most essential qualitative changes concerning adoption.

Adoption practice in traditional Bulgarian society was a deep-seated element of cultural memory. Memories about adopted children were not shared, but were common knowledge for the entire community. Countless personal life stories shape the pattern of a practice that belongs to a set of cultural actions seeking to achieve and maintain unity and social harmony in the kinship group. Children without parents are the living image of disharmony that threatens the well-being of kin and community alike. The memory of adoption is alive because it provides a way to clear out a social ordeal that would affect all. Unlike customarily established and regulated traditional social relations, the state in socialist Bulgaria regulated far more than the adoption act itself. By employing legal and administrative measures, government institutions, and public organizations attempted to erase the memory of child adoption. Accounts about adoption were incriminated, persecuted, and punished by statutory as well as moral law. Government regulation of memories failed, however, and that “arrested” memory lived on, subdued and shared.

Bulgarian common law until the early twentieth century regarded childless families and children without parents as individuals in an abnormal situation that would be corrected through ritual public action. It was enacted in a social milieu where not only everyone knew each other, but where they were often connected by blood or nonblood kinship. Adoption was performed by families who were childless, whose children had died, or who had no male offspring. Adoption, taking place within the kinship group, thus constructed a new “complete” family. The adopted child could only be a “complete orphan,” i.e., a motherless child. When no such child was available, a child from another blood-related circle was adopted under the analogous condition of being a “complete orphan.” It was given a new name and was christened by the godfather of the adopting family. There were no other possibilities because cohabitation out of wedlock was an exception and aberration from the norm. Out-of-wedlock children were “bastards” and were either killed or abandoned. Morally sanctioned sexual relations were only those within a married family, where strict age rules were observed for husband and wife. Adoption did not terminate the child’s kinship ties and affiliation, but the foster parents took the child as their own with all ensuing consequences. The ritual actions followed several patterns and either mimicked the basic phases of biological birth, or made the child one with kin and family through words and specific gestures. The act was sanctioned by a priest and by the presence of the biological parents who handed over the child to its new family. This was a type of simple¹ adoption because no blood ties were severed.² Traditional culture also knew another type called “fosterling,” whereby a child (most often a girl) would be raised until a dowry was prepared and the child was safely married off.

Adoption as a monolithic institution was challenged in the newly created Bulgarian state after 1878. In the context of new economic and social dynamics, state building, and a new legal system, the social fabric was reshaped, giving rise to relations and social behavior different from the established models. Gradually, the characteristics of the basic family type were changed. One ramification of these interlinked factors was the emergence of a new group of “special” children. Labeled “waifs and strays,” “children of the street,” or “spoilt children,” they were grouped together with all the other “different ones”: abandoned children, illegitimate children, orphans. All these names were applied to

¹ Justinian law recognizes two types of adoption: *adoptio plena* and *adoptio minus plena* (Liliana Nenova, *Semeino pravo na Republika Bŭlgariia* [Sofia: D-r Petŭr Beron, 1994], 304).

² Vasil Baldzhiev, “Studiia vŭrkhu nasheto personalno sŭpruzhesko pravo,” *Sbornik za bŭlgarski narodni umotvoreniia* (Sofia: Dŭrzhavna pechatnitsa, 1894), 256; Mikhail Andreev, *Bŭlgarskoto obichaino pravo* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1979), 209; Khristo Vakarelski, *Etnografiia na Bŭlgariia* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1974), 541; Elia Tsaneva, “Simvolika na ritualite pri osinoviavane na dete,” in *Etnografski problemi na narodnata dukhovna kultura* (Sofia: Club 90, 1990), 138–69.

children of very different status. The main common denominator was their way of life, partly or entirely outside any family or blood-related milieu. These children were most often born to mothers engaged in extramarital relations. Their kindred structures did not cast upon them the rescuing net of in-family adoption because this went against the established cultural norm. Within the traditionally organized social organism they were a foreign body, a product of the new conditions, a birthmark on the social profile of the capital and other big cities. Society responded to their existence through charitable organizations—women’s, ethnic, and religious charities, and arranged for their care without ignoring their kinship affiliation. The work of these organizations was influenced by the forms and arrangements of British, Russian, and American charities as well as the international child protection movement. The first nurseries for abandoned children opened in Sofia as early as 1900. Several orphanages were set up before the war and later merged into a union that functioned in close liaison with the Bulgarian Red Cross. In 1924 the League of Nations adopted the Geneva Declaration on the Rights of the Child and the International Union for the Protection of Children supported the creation of a Bulgarian chapter. This marked the beginning of institutional care for “special” children. The union gradually spanned its network in towns and villages around the country. By 1930 there were twenty-eight city chapters and ninety-five village committees. With the Public Assistance Act in 1934, charity became part of the government’s social policy. Coordination of activities was carried out through an Annual State Plan under the oversight of the Ministry of Interior and Public Health.³

Until the 1940s the core of traditional adoption practices was essentially unimpaired, the predominant being adoption within the kinship group through the familiar ritual actions. However, the existence of children outside the care of family and kin caused the creation of the first “nonfamily” homes where they could be raised. This was a step toward disconnecting them from their biological ancestors. State intervention and sanction found expression in a number of regulations that legally administered the *status quo*, and in the state’s shared participation in the organization and funding of the homes. The possibility of adopting was legally settled in 1889 with the Act on Recognition of Illegitimate Children and Their Legitimation and Adoption, followed by the Guardianship Act of 1890 and the Illegitimate Children and Adoption Act in 1940.⁴ Under these laws,

until 1961 our family law had established adoption that stood between the classical full and simple adoption. Adopted children retained their biological kinship ties together with the entailing rights and responsibilities. Parent rights belonged to the adopter but the adoptee would enter into kinship relations only with the adopter and not with his kinship group.⁵

³ Kristina Popova, *Natsionalnoto dete* (Sofia: Lik, 1999), 65–128.

⁴ Nenova, *Semeino pravo na Republika Bilgariia*, 26.

⁵ Pancho Beshkov, *Osinoviavaneto po bilgarskoto semeino pravo* (Sofia: Feneia, 1996), 53–54.

The age gap between adopter and adoptee was fixed at fifteen years in an attempt to cut short adoptions of adults whose obvious purpose was material gain. This was a long-standing practice. For instance, an adoptee in Pernik in 1903 was a married man with three children; in 1909 a childless family adopted another young family; in 1914 a widow adopted a family and their children; and a son-in-law was adopted in 1926.⁶ A particular aspect was the requirement that the biological mother personally appear in court during the adoption, or the parties produce her notarized written consent. If the parents were unknown, consent was provided by the manager of the home where the foster child was raised (art. 33, art. 35, and art. 39 of the 1940 act). As stipulated by the changing laws in the new Bulgarian state, the first adoption acts were made public by announcements put up in special places determined by the respective court, and were promulgated in *Dirzhaven vestnik* (The state gazette) and the local press.

The traditional matrix of adoption within the kinship group continued to be active throughout this period, but, first in Sofia as well as in Plovdiv and other big cities, families would make their “own” child, which belonged neither to the husband’s nor to the wife’s kinship group, and whose origin was either obscure or illegitimate. A whole group of children emerged who were raised in homes run by charities and who stayed there not only seasonally or for a fixed period of time. Some were orphans whose relatives were unwilling to take them in. According to common practice illegitimate children were adopted when they were recognized by the father. The age gap between adoptee and adopters was fixed, but the age of adoptees varied and was gradually decreasing. The foster family was always childless and its attempts to conceal the act of adoption and keep it secret were facilitated by legal amendments. The legal modality enforced simple adoption, whereas everyday practice aimed at the well-known and well-established form of full adoption with its attempts to simulate biological filiation.

The pattern of adoptive practice under socialism molded the inherited norms of tradition and the experience of the previous government structure. Its elaboration may be tentatively divided into two subperiods: until the mid-1960s, and until the end of the 1990s. The distinctive features of each period are contingent on the respective developments in ideology and their enforcement as an established social norm. The power of the state covered comprehensively the most private sphere of human existence—family life—in a purposeful attempt to gradually push back the traditional norms of common law and make them of secondary importance. The main regulatory role concerning family relations was undertaken by family law as part of an emerging uniform legal system. A specific model of adoptive practice emerged together with a set of characteristic features, some of them manifest already in the previous period.

⁶ TDDA Pernik (Teritorialna Direktsia Dirzhaven Arkhiv/Territorial State Archive Directorate), f. 143, op. 1.

The socialist period brought about substantial changes in family life. The nuclear family gradually became the basic social unit which was economically autonomous. Its entire structure was transformed, changing the positions and roles of its constituent members. Social policies dealing with the family were defined as policies on women and the family. One of the big political goals of the 1970s was formulated as raising the role of women in the further building of socialism and providing conditions for their development and establishment as equitable members of society. A significant outcome of these new conditions and roles assigned to women was a type of social equality that entailed completely different forms of childcare and child rearing. Children were increasingly “brought out” of the family and placed from an early age in the care of children’s institutions. Gradually this produced a social environment where it seemed completely natural that government care should also encompass children relinquished by their parents.

Using the methods of ethnographic field research, a body of data was recorded and is currently available at the Scientific Archives of the Ethnographical Institute and Museum of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (AEIM).⁷ The bulk concerns the socialist and postsocialist period which has not been thoroughly explored from an ethnographic perspective.⁸ The recorded interviews are active memories of firsthand participants in the adoption act that is an ongoing process. They are not only emotionally vibrant; because of their complex, multifaceted nature, they change substantially depending on the time the account was given. Concrete, real facts are blended with a fictional, artificially created family history exhibited to the public eye of a society that enforced secrecy upon adoption, but slowly began to change this attitude in today’s dynamic reality. The key actors in this social plot constantly switch places and their different viewpoints seep in their accounts. For instance, as adults, adopted children frequently seek information about their biological parents. Once they get it, they rethink their life story. According to the respective position of the respondents, memories can be defined as personal, family-based, kinship-based, institutional and public. Another type of information comes from numerous publications in

⁷ The archive spanning over 600 pages was collected through a series of interviews conducted in 2005–2008 in various towns and villages in Bulgaria by a research team (V. Nikolova, E. Tsaneva, and A. Kirilova) under a research project of the Ministry of Education and Science, Project Ref. 1410/2004. Sources also include interviews of students from the New Bulgarian University attending the Behavioral and Social Sciences Program. AEIM, No. 611-III, 615-III, 616-III, 624-III, 629-III, 674-III.

⁸ A specific feature of the interviews is that some are anonymous according to the explicit will of the respondents. Quotes from such informants indicate only their age and initials. Male respondents were rare and as a rule were officials. The interviews covered different positions with regard to adoption: foster parents, adoptees, and officials at various levels. There are scarce accounts from biological parents who left their children for adoption.

the press, the electronic media, and web forums.⁹ Although they put in the spotlight the current state and developments of adoption, these sources also contain valuable data about earlier periods. The issues arising from adoption practices during the socialist era have been analyzed and evaluated mainly from the viewpoint of jurisdiction concerning amendments and the evolution of law or the social and biological consequences for the children and foster parents. The ethnological aspect of the phenomenon has appeared only in a few works.¹⁰

The philosophy of adoption practice under socialism was dominated by and manifested most clearly in the Communist Party's ideology that underpinned the development of society in the socialist state. Adoption was placed under ideologically justified objectives that became the guiding and defining principle of everyday existence. The family, as the principal agent of socialization, was accorded a fundamental role. It was formulated in juxtaposition to capitalist family and kinship relations: "The bourgeois family had to be dismantled and the patriarchal one surmounted, because they were not in line with the new conditions."¹¹ This goal rested upon the classical works of Marxism,¹² but while it opposed their extreme tenets, it followed the Soviet model. Family was termed the "stem cell" of society and its chief function was its duty to increase the numbers of the nation. This was not in conflict with public childcare. The ambivalent relationship between ideological clichés and reality, where there were childless families (i.e., insufficiently "healthy" families failing to procreate for the sake of society) and worse, rejected and abandoned children, was addressed by a series of governmental and political actions. It was a heavy-handed intervention in the social sphere, expecting individuality to be subordinated to the socially significant. The active agent of supreme social engineering was the state itself with its instruments: government structures and public organizations.

⁹ The bTV show *Iskreno i lichno* (Forthright and personal; once a month in the course of two or three years the program's theme was "Where Are You, Near and Dear Ones?"); the Nova TV show *Imash Poshta* (You have mail); the dailies *24 Hours*, *Trud*; a set of "women's newspapers"—*Vestnik za Zhenata*, *Zhenata*, other indirect successors to the official publication of the Bulgarian Women's Committee, the *Zhenata Dnes* digest (which ran from the 1940s until the 1990s), web forums such as *Bg Mama*, etc.

¹⁰ Vania Nikolova, Anny Kirilova, and Evgenia Krísteva-Blagoeva, "Osinovenoto dete: mezhdu dirzhavata i semeistvoto," in *Vsekidnevната kultura na bilgarite i sirbite v postsotsialisticheskia period* (Sofia: EIM BAN, 2005), 167–74. Anny Kirilova, "Dirzhavniiat shírkel," in *V sveta na choveka* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo "Sv. Kliment Okhridski," 2008), 345–54.

¹¹ Pencho Kubadinski, *Za sotsialisticheskoto semeistvo* (Sofia: Izdatelstvo na Otechestvenniia front, 1986), 38, 41–42.

¹² The family model formulated by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels in *The German Ideology* implied that childcare should be transferred to the public (Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Izbrani sichinenia* [Sofia: Partizdat, 1984], vol. 2, 68–168). Engels defined childcare as a public task pertaining with equal force to children born in and out of wedlock (Friedrich Engels, *Za zhenata i semeistvoto* [Sofia: Partizdat, 1978], 147).

The key instrument of the highest order was the legal system.¹³ The Legal Ordinance on Marriage (1945) not only introduced mandatory civil marriage as the single valid form, but also established equal status for children born in and out of wedlock. These acts were affirmed by the Constitution of 1947, and two years later the Persons and Family Act stipulated in detail the issues of filiation, adoption, kinship, guardianship, and trusteeship. Its 1961 amendment introduced full adoption that terminated the rights and responsibilities between the adoptee and the original relatives; the adoptee and his/her descendants entered into kinship relations with the foster parents and their relatives.¹⁴ All prior adoptions were remade according to the new law and were converted into full adoptions. Thus many foster families, who undertook that role under different terms, were confronted with a *fait accompli*. The most comprehensive settlement of family relations was stipulated under the holistic Family Code of 1968.

The legal regulation of family relations in the second period until the 1990s upheld the overarching principle of government protection of marriage and the family. The new Family Code of 1985 placed an emphasis on strengthening the family and foresaw respective penalties, if it failed to adequately perform its basic functions.¹⁵ In unison with these basic legal acts, further government and political decisions exercised indirect influence. One such act was the prohibition on free choice of residence.¹⁶ A 1955 ordinance provisionally restricted the admission of new citizens in Sofia, Plovdiv, Varna, Burgas, and Russe. The following year Stara Zagora and Pleven were added. This was followed in 1974 by Decree No. 112 of the Council of Ministers that restricted admission of new citizens in all towns and cities in the country.¹⁷ The regulations provided for exceptions for specialists in areas experiencing shortage of professionals, people marrying Sofia residents, time required to obtain higher education, job competitions for management positions, and military officers. All these options created an environment that facilitated the temporary or permanent settlement of many young people in the larger cities. Heavy and light industry plants mushroomed in or around the cities, supplied with a migrant workforce from the nearby villages or remote corners of the country. In some cases entire new cities were built, like Dimitrograd (dubbed the City of Youth), Pernik, etc.

¹³ Without placing a direct focus on adoption, the first acts and regulations set the stage for it, such as the Legal Ordinance on Equating the Rights of Persons of Both Sexes (*Dîrzhaven vestnik* 227, 1944) and the Legal Ordinance on Legalizing Factual Matrimonial Relations (*The State Gazette* 250, 1945).

¹⁴ Beshkov, *Osinoviavaneto po bilgarskoto semeino pravo*, 53–54.

¹⁵ Liliana Nenova, *Semeino pravo. Tilkuvatelen spravochnik* (Sofia: D-r Petîr Beron, 1990), 28–33.

¹⁶ The first restrictive measure of this type was enforced with respect to the capital Sofia in 1942.

¹⁷ This detailed and long-lived residence-related ordinance was repealed by Decree No. 51, 7 August 1990.

The 1950s saw the emergence of a long-lasting government policy for “administering the population.” One of its forms was the compulsory three-year employment of university graduates in a locality selected by the government depending on economic necessity. The result was the forceful dislocation of significant population strata in their prime reproductive age. Part of the same policy was the attitude toward “idlers and loiterers” and people with unearned income. After the nationalization of the industry, mass cooperatives and the subsequent industrialization were among the socioeconomic reasons that led to salient migration processes in the 1950s, chiefly from the villages toward the urban centers.¹⁸ Bulgaria’s larger cities saw an influx of students, workers, army personnel, and other population categories that stayed for various periods of time. Most had lived in a traditional normative environment and in a radically different situation, many lost the familiar bearings of social orientation. One consequence was unwanted pregnancies. Poor health awareness and almost complete lack of contraception most often resulted in “single motherhood.” Illegitimate children made up the largest share of children left for adoption, especially during the first subperiod. Statistical data indicate a steady trend in the numbers of illegitimate births at about 3,000–4,000 children in 1950, 1951, and 1952. Illegitimate birth rates stood at 23.2% in the mid-1950s, 27% in the 1970s, and 24.5% in the 1980s. By contrast, legitimate births dramatically dropped from 125.6% in 1946–1947 to 67.7% in 1985–1986. Most illegitimate children were born by teenage girls.

In traditional Bulgarian society single motherhood was a disgrace that led to rejection or social exclusion. Facing this threat, girls in such circumstances found support and a solution in the regulated opportunity offered by the state to renounce their children and hand them over to government-run childcare homes. At the same time, the country increasingly needed human resources for labor and defense in the face of a sustainable trend of dropping birth rates. Between 1947 and 1956 birth rates in the cities came down from 23.1 to 17.5%. In 1950 the ratio between live births and the total population was 25 per 1,000, falling to 18 per 1,000 in 1960, and 17 per 1,000 in 1975. In order to address this negative trend, a widespread campaign was launched to protect the “woman mother.” In 1951 the newspaper *Izvestiia* promulgated the “Birth Promotion” edict, which, along with privileges for mothers like leaves and keeping their job while pregnant, introduced a “singles tax” (popularly known as the “bachelor’s tax”). This was an economic penalty aimed at men aged 21–50 and women aged 21–45, who had no children due to health reasons or because they chose not to. The measure pertained to unmarried people of reproductive age, as well as married couples without children. When medical reasons were involved (at a time when

¹⁸ Boika Vasileva, *Migratsionni protsesi v Bilgariia sled Vtorata svetovna voina* (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1991), 6–7, 21–22.

artificial insemination was not yet available), childless couples were indirectly coaxed toward adoption. Low birth rates, however, had largely diminished the pool of adoptable children within the kinship group. This was not the case with children raised in the institutions.

Another birth-promotion measure was the complete ban on abortions in the 1951 Penal Code, valid until 1956, when they were permitted only on medical grounds. Attempts to bypass the ban often led to unwanted births or handicapped children, yet another reason for mothers to hand them over to governmental care. The consequence was even greater numbers of “public” children. In a drive to “boost” the socialist family, the new Penal Code of 1956 explicitly set forth a penalty of up to six months in prison or a fine up to 1,000 leva, as well as public reprimand for husbands who abandoned their family and engaged in illegitimate cohabitation. The same penalty was envisaged for the person living with the culpable husband, and repeat wrongdoing was charged with three years in prison. Despite this, such cohabitations also produced children, many of whom were left in the government-run homes to be raised or adopted.

The ideological framework that was called upon to shape and maintain the harmony between society, the family, and the individual attached special attention to the “woman mother.” In 1973 the Bulgarian Communist Party passed a special decision to that effect called “Main Guidelines for Elevating the Role of Women in Building an Advanced Socialist Society.” The observance of “proper” behavior by the members of the “stem cell” was vigilantly monitored by sociopolitical organizations such as the Fatherland Front and its derivative, the Comrades’ Court (promulgated in 1961), job-based party chapters, the Dimitrov Komsomol Youth Union, trade unions, and the Organization of Bulgarian Women. They all acted as *sui generis* filters and mouthpieces of public opinion. A 1951 act criminalized pornography that was corrupting the socialist society and the family. The socialist family had to be upheld forever, guided by shared feelings of comradeship, mutual aid and, first and foremost, ideological allegiance.

Throughout the entire socialist period individual reproductive behavior was of primary concern to the state. Children outside the “Mommy, Daddy and I/We” model became a crossing point for the interests of the state and the individual. Their numbers were constantly rising due to extramarital affairs and unwanted pregnancies. Fewer children came from separated parents where, for instance, the mother’s husband was not the child’s father.¹⁹ Women who gave birth to illegitimate children delegated their rights to the state in the role of a “public parent.” The existing institutions were no longer an element of charity, but became a neat, government-run system. Called “mother and child homes” (an ironic reflection of a factual and transient reality, where the mothers spent a

¹⁹ AEIM No. 611-III, 43.

little time with their children shortly before and after giving birth), they were stationary establishments for at-risk children, medically and socially. They received and raised healthy children and children with health problems, left only temporarily or for adoption. As an institution they combined the roles of home and parent. Until the 1960s they also took in expecting mothers after their sixth month of pregnancy. Women who were going to renounce their children stayed in no longer than a month after giving birth. Overall, thirteen such homes were created between 1945 and 1952. The practice died out after the 1970s, and the homes were renamed “medical and social care homes for children”; they started getting children from gynecological hospitals and wards that were signed off there. The homes also took care of children whose parents were not renouncing them or putting them for adoption, but who, for various economic or medical reasons, needed to resort to social welfare.

There are various reasons why mothers would do anything to conceal giving birth and abandoning their child, chief among them the extremely negative public attitude.²⁰ The public was aware of the existence of such women and children. But whereas for the mothers the secret birth under the cloak of the state²¹ could possibly remain a confined personal experience until the end of their lives, for the children the circumstances of their coming into this world and their potential adoption stigmatized them for good. The law created conditions to conceal this, but in practice the secret was spilled out, because “there’ll always be someone to tell the child” (G. R., b. 1942).²² This was the opinion of the former manager of a home with more than thirty years of experience. Most often close relatives would “bring out the truth”: “My relatives always talked about me being adopted. My aunt, my father’s sister, told me when I was twelve.”²³ The heads of state homes confirmed this: “Say, can you ever keep anything secret in Bulgaria, this small country, this city.”²⁴ The culture of the law and the culture of life were different.

Although this function was not stipulated by law, the social and legal offices of hospitals acted as interim units whose aim was to assist future mothers in several areas, such as attempts to get in touch with the potential father, filiation and allowance proceedings, preparation of renouncement statements, filling out the paperwork for the child’s transfer to a mother and child home, covering the

²⁰ Maria Belcheva, *Sotsialno-demografski izsledvaniia i analizi* (Sofia: Faber, 2004), 133–35.

²¹ Vania Nikolova, “Tainata na osinoviavaneto—iavniiat beleg na modela,” *Bilgarska Etnografiia* 3 (2008): 5–22. A report from the head of the Social and Legal Assistance Office at the First Obstetric and Gynecological Hospital in Sofia indicated that its work with single mothers was successful because “117 girls were placed in institutions for concealing and bringing to term pregnancies.... All measures were taken for preserving the secret of pregnancy and birth.”

²² AEIM No. 616-III.

²³ AEIM No. 615-III, 4.

²⁴ AEIM No. 615-III, 37.

mother who gave illegitimate birth, and attempts to coax the mother not to abandon her child. These offices hosted meetings with prospective adopters and prepared their papers. Their role in the adoption process gradually diminished and was limited to preparation of the child's transfer papers. Through a public board at each home, comprising representatives of the Fatherland Front, the Bulgarian Red Cross, and the Bulgarian Women's Committee, the government assisted these women to reenter social life. The same function was assigned to the social and legal offices that were closed down at the end of the 1980s.

Once the mother signed a renouncement statement, the child became “public” to the fullest extent. Their continually increasing numbers led to the creation of new homes in almost all district centers.²⁵ There the children were socially excluded, potentially expecting a new existence and affiliation. Their ties with their biological ancestors were severed. For some of them, the home was where they acquired a new identity. Their future parents came there and the home's manager was the “architect” of the family. The manager kept all papers about the child and the prospective foster parents.²⁶ The adopters filed their written application, explicitly specifying the child's desired gender and age, the results from their physical and mental medical tests, and proof of their property status. The manager exercised discretion as to which child should be given to a certain family. Prospective parents could see very few of the children, usually two or three short-listed by the manager. The head of the home was the state agent and specific actor creating a new family.²⁷ His/her judgment was made final by a court decision that closed the procedure and initiated “another” life not only for the child and its parents, but also for a very broad group of people: relatives, colleagues, neighbors, and friends. The “cell” of the society was now transformed from a married couple into a complete family as a result of social *in vitro* engineering.

During the first tentative socialist subperiod “in-family” and “out-of-family” adoptions ran parallel to one another until adoption of children outside the kinship group gradually became prevalent. The 1960s marked the watershed between the two subperiods. The main reasons were the dropping birth rates as well as changing family patterns, and the limited number of adoptable children within the kinship group.²⁸ The legal type of adoption changed in 1961. All

²⁵ There were four homes in the entire country until 1944, seventeen in 1952 and thirty in 1965.

²⁶ AEIM No. 615-III, 32–37; *Dirzhaven vestnik* 17, 1967, and 18, 1975.

²⁷ AEIM No. 615-III.

²⁸ The Family Code of 1968 introduced two types of adoption—full and basic, the latter for all practical purposes irrelevant. Two categories of adoptable children were defined: children with unknown parents and children for whom the mother had signed a renouncement statement. The Family Code of 1985 established a third category of children not claimed by their parents within a year from the end of a fixed period. A frequent practice was to constantly extend this period.

prior and future adoptions were equated under identical terms. The court-ruled full adoption, severing the ties between the child and its biological parents, creation of a new identity through the respective papers (the birth certificate), registration of the adopters as birth parents, and confidentiality of the act.²⁹ The new birth certificate was “officially counterfeited” by the state.³⁰

Multiple accounts of adopted people, now adults, corroborate that until the 1960s the customary practice was adoption within the family. In such cases the act was not to be discussed: the child belonged to the kinship group that was informed and involved in the adoption. Silence was a kind of secret because the adopted child would now be in a different position with respect to its closest relatives (for example, its birth mother could now be its aunt, and its brothers were cousins). If the child was older and remembered its birth parents, there could be no secrets: “I was adopted by my aunt, my mother’s sister, when I was three or four years old. I called her “auntie” and I still knew who my mother was, my brothers, too. We were four kids, and my father was drinking.... Whereas my aunt, she was a nurse, she never married. So the two of us came over and lived in Sofia” (account by K. V., b. 1952). An adopted woman from Pernik, with her own family and children, had “always known about it because I was adopted in the family of relatives before I turned of age. I was raised by my uncle and his wife and I was troubled a little because I had two pairs of parents. It was the same at my wedding, standing there with two moms and two fathers.”

One of the major traits of the socialist adoption model—secrecy—was observed most strictly in the second subperiod starting in the 1970s. Confidentiality was entrusted to the public institutions and disclosure entailed legal penalties.³¹ The adopters were the main actors in that joint performance between the state and the individual. They would keep the secret even at the price of changing their place of residence, building a false family background, going abroad before or immediately after the adoption to return only years later, “but while she was still here, she spread the word she was pregnant in the first months, and she’s always been a fatty,”³² primitive imitations of pregnancy by the adopting mother and “accidental birth” in another city, or adopting a child from a locality far away from the adopters’ place of residence: “I adopted a small child and I took pictures of myself holding another woman’s baby in front of the maternity hospital, they were just leaving... I took care to pick the right season, the same as that of my [adopted] child, and I was careful what clothes to wear, too” (ac-

²⁹ The Family Code of 1968 stipulated that the adopters must be registered as the child’s parents. The location where the birth certificate was issued was filled in as the child’s birthplace, while the birth date and the date when the certificate was drawn up were often different.

³⁰ Nenova, *Semeino pravo na Republika Bilgariia*, 337, 348.

³¹ *Dirzhaven vestnik* 53, 1963, art. 26 and 28; *ibid.* 92, 1980; *ibid.* 28, 1982, art. 145.

³² AEIM No. 616-III, 3.

count by V. S., b. 1952).³³ The mass practice at the time was to adopt children from the public homes or from the maternity hospitals, which made it easier to limit the number of people who knew about it.³⁴ The possibility of obtaining a completely new identity for the child was supposed to increase the number of adoptions. One single home in Sofia reported 35 adopted children in 1970, 185 in 1975, and 31 in 1979.³⁵

The adoptive practices enacted with this philosophy outline an interesting profile of adopters and adoptees. As a rule foster parents were a childless couple and adopted only one child. The prospective parents were already older and convinced that having their own child was impossible, or their child had died.³⁶ Adoption was usually initiated by the woman who had a very strong, traditionally imposed feeling of guilt.³⁷ Once she made the first step, she was always accompanied by her husband in all further actions, but he had a secondary role. Even in their family life later he was reluctant to discuss it. During an interview an adopted child explained that his foster father would never agree to be interviewed, something that explains the absence of male informants in our pool.³⁸ Adoptions by single women (unmarried, divorced, or widowed) were an exception. Single-man adoption was an extremely rare case.³⁹ Most adoptions were made by Bulgarians followed by ethnic Turks. In the last decades, rather as an exception to the rule, there were also adoptions by Roma parents. Children left for adoption had a renouncement statement signed by their mother. Most often they would be illegitimate, born into families with many children or after late pregnancies. Along with economic, health, and social circumstances (if the mother died), a recurrent theme in the first subperiod was one typical for traditional Bulgarian culture: “I’m pregnant when my daughter is also pregnant,” “I already have grandchildren.” Such explanations were never pointed out as a reason for relinquishing a child after the 1970s. The ethnic profile of adoptable children can be traced from the opinions voiced by the heads of the homes but there is no documented evidence because this indicator was not recorded. It may be imputed by the name of the mother or father. A mass practice was to leave Roma children in the care of public homes. Many of them received renouncement statements right away and were listed for adoption.⁴⁰

³³ AEIM No. 616-III, a.

³⁴ AEIM No. 615-III, 7–8, 73–74; 611-III, 20.

³⁵ SGO DA (Sofiiski Gradski i Okrŕzhven Dŕrzhaven Arkhiv/Sofia City and District State Archive), f. 2607.

³⁶ AEIM No. 615-III, 7; 611-III, 8.

³⁷ AEIM No. 615-III, 61; AEIM No. 629-III.

³⁸ AEIM No. 615-III, 3.

³⁹ AEIM No. 611-III, 24.

⁴⁰ AEIM No. 615-III, 32.

Several factors took precedence in the rank list of desired preferences for adoption. First came the requirement for a healthy Bulgarian child (if the adopters were Bulgarian, this was a definitive requirement). Exceptions with respect to the child's physical condition were only allowed for when the problems could be handled by the efforts of Bulgarian medicine or when the parents were unaware of the situation.⁴¹ Bulgarian parents demonstrated stark reluctance to adopt children of Roma descent.⁴² They were less categorical about Turkish, Jewish, or Armenian children, but there were few adoptable children from those groups. The second most important factor was the child's appearance, with a preference for white skin, blond hair, and light eyes. Preferences about gender or the religion of the biological parents were not so definitive. The adopters wished the child to have been born as recently as possible.⁴³ In order to meet this wish, which ran against the medical standards covering manifestation of congenital abnormalities, children were adopted immediately from the maternity ward or from the social homes before they were even a month old. The young age of the children contributed not only to maintaining secrecy, but also to building the new family history. The parents tried to "enhance" the supposed innate qualities of the child ("its biological father was a professor who erred with his student,"⁴⁴ or the parents were a university student and a schoolgirl, or both were still at school). This was directed to the close relatives who would accept the new person more easily; or it was a justification of the biological parents whose youth and lack of knowledge excluded deliberate abandonment; or it eliminated any implied shortcomings and built an idealistic perception about the child. For the direct participants and the members of their close circle, the act of adoption was not over with the court decision. Psychologically, it started after the court decision and continued for life. The positions of adopters and adopted child would shift with time, but the social program no longer offered a framework; the model contained no recipes and came to an open end.

Adopted children had a special place in the overall profile of society. Abandoned by their biological parents, they remained outside the biological and social chain of society until their potential adoption. Once adopted, they entered a life plot framed by the state where the legal consequences of the act of adoption were conceptualized and represented as biological ones. The children joined the

⁴¹ Most often this was unintentional, when the child was too young and abnormalities were not yet manifest.

⁴² AEIM No. 611-III, 5, 8, 13, 22.

⁴³ AEIM No. 611-III, 42; 615-III, 35.

⁴⁴ The "professor-student" biological filiation of many children according to their adoptive parents became something of a cliché. Its "deciphering" in a historical context offers multiple possibilities to analyze systems of values as well as gender, age and social roles, positions, guilt, and assessments in society—the professor "erred," but what about the girl who was his student? In some variations, it was the student girl who "erred."

proper “stem cell” of society that expected them to join the rank and file, and most often did not forget or subsequently learned that they were adopted, sharing their experience with others who had similar life stories.

The password for the socialist family was a “healthy” family complete with a child (or children). A child was the pinnacle of the social chain of human reproduction, but was also a step in the ladder. When the natural development of that chain and ladder was disrupted, the state interfered with its constantly evolving techniques. They aimed to achieve the main goal, which at the close of the socialist period was to limit the number of children raised in public homes. The adoption model under socialism was intended for a baby (child) who was an object rather than an agent in the process. The model was fully aligned with an ideology that proclaimed to be doing everything for the sake of the child and its well-being. The practice, however, was to look for a child for certain parents rather than parents for a certain child. This tension between the official doctrine and the exigencies of everyday life gave rise to the type of adoption that was outlined here in its complex and fluid contours.

14. Remembering Communism: Field Studies in Pernik, 1960–1964

Tania Boneva

In my study, I have tried to overcome the one-sided image of communism/socialism in Bulgaria. I hope that it answers some of the critical questions about the development of Bulgarian society in the twentieth century, and that it presents a complex picture of both peasants and workers in the region of Pernik at that time, in particular with regard to the problems of economic and social modernization of Bulgarian society in the period of communism/socialism. The social inequalities between peasants and workers, the focus on industrialization and massive migration to the town—a process typical for the whole communist period in Bulgaria—together with the party ideology of atheism, makes it very difficult to describe in only positive or negative terms the process of social and cultural changes under communism.

Ethnographic studies during the socialist period in Bulgaria were institutionalized in 1947 with the establishment of a research institute at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, which in 1949 merged with the National Ethnographical Museum and received its present name: Ethnographical Institute and Museum at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (EIM/BAN).¹ Since the 1950s EIM researchers sought to bring field work up-to-date and to explore Bulgarian society as a dynamic reality that reflected the radical social transformations under socialism. One example was the *Ethnographic Survey Questionnaire for the Labor Cooperative Farms* (Angelova & Primovski, Sofia, 1951), which compiled data about the rural population and its culture during the extremely traumatic economic reform, which set up collective cultivation in cooperative farms

¹ Ignat Minkov, “Etnolozhkite izsledvaniia v EIM na BAN vîrkhu sîvremennostta v Bîlgariia prez 50-te–80-te godini na 20 vek,” in *Problemi na sîvremennata etnografiia. Sbornik po sluchai 30 godini na sektsiia Etnografiia na sîvremennostta v EIM*, ed. Nadya Velcheva (Sofia: EIM/BAN, 2004), 40.

(TKZS) according to the Soviet model.² In the 1950s EIM/BAN researchers started collecting field material about the “socialist restructuring” of the village with studies of Dropla, Tolbukhin district (AIM, Inv. #342-II, 1959), and Rîzhevo Konare, Plovdiv district (1957–1960). A number of other villages followed in the 1960s–1980s: Knizhovnik, Khaskovo district; Stamovo, Stara Zagora district (AEIM, Inv. #314-II, 1961); Gramada, Vidin district (AEIM, Inv. #452-II, 1974); Spasovo, Stara Zagora district (1980). Most of the field sources were never published and are preserved in their primary form as archive materials at the EIM Research Archive.³ These studies provided the first ethnographical sources that responded to the ideological demand to collect positive descriptions of the socialist village and to accumulate empirical material on the subject. In the early 1960s another field research directive in the USSR focused on exploring the working class and its culture and daily life.⁴

The first working-class research project carried out by the Ethnographical Institute and Museum was “The Daily Life and Culture of the Working-Class Family in the Town of Dimitrovo (Pernik District)” (1960–1964). Later in the 1960s the same ideological approach was applied to working-class research in the city of Sliven.⁵ The collection of relevant material was associated with the proclaimed role of the working class in the creation of “modern daily life.” The term “daily life” was borrowed from Soviet ethnographic studies. A 1965 article about the ethnographical study of the daily life of Bulgarian workers provides a definition:

² The Soviet model was not fully implemented because the farmers joining the TKZS cooperatives formally retained ownership over their land. That enabled the land’s reprivatization in 1991. See Vladimir Migevev, *Problemi na agrarnoto razvitie na Bilgariia (1944–1960)* (Sofia: K i M, 1998), 7–3; and Vladimir Migevev, “Utvîrzhdavane i razgrîshtane na stalinistkîia model na sotsializma v Bilgariia (1948–1953),” in *Stranitsi ot bilgarskata istoriia*, ed. Maria Boseva (Sofia: Prosveta, 1993), vol. 2, 62–65.

³ A noteworthy document is the description of the Georgi Dimitrov TKZS Cooperative in the village of Rîzhevo Konare, Plovdiv district, in the dissertation of Raina Pesheva-Popova (*Semeistvo i semeen bit v c. Rîzhevo Konare, Plovdivsko*, PhD diss., Sofia, 1960). The dissertation is in the EIM/BAN Research Archive, Inv. #235-II, and provided the basis for a book: Raina Pesheva-Popova, *Bit i kultura na seloto* (Sofia: Zemizdat, 1970). See also *Vliianie na selskite trudovi kolektivi virkhu obshtestvenite otnoshenia v seloto (selo Knizhovnik, Khaskovsko, selo Stamovo, Starozagorsko i selo Chernogorovo, Pazardzhishko)* (AEIM, Inv. #314-II, 222 l.), as well as the study in the village of Gramada, Vidin district, in the late 1970s (AEIM, Inv. #452-II, 457-II, 476-II–479-II, 485-II–489-II).

⁴ Vera Yurievna Krupianskaia, “K voprosu o problematike i metodike etnograficheskogo izucheniia sovetskogo rabochego klassa,” *Voprosy istorii* 11 (1960): 3–18; Leonid Pavlovich Potapov, “Etnograficheskoe izuchenie sotsialisticheskoy kul’tury i byta narodov SSSR,” *Sovetskaia etnografiia* 2 (1962): 3–19.

⁵ See Ivanichka Georgieva, “Kîm vîprosa za formiraneto, razvitiето i harakteristikata na rabotnicheskata klasa v grad Sliven,” *Izvestiia na Bilgarskoto istoricheskoto druzhestvo* 26 (1968): 139–64; and Ivanichka Georgieva, “Razvitiето na dukhovnia bit na sîvremennata rabotnicheska mladezh v grad Sliven,” *Izvestiia na EIM* 10 (1967): 201–29.

Daily life as a sphere of human activity is determined first and foremost by the nature of socioeconomic relations and the level of development of the material and technical basis of society.... It covers the material and cultural circumstances of life outside people's immediate productive activities. It is a direct reflection of the ways and forms of satisfying the need for housing, food, clothes, recreation, entertainment, etc.⁶

This ideological framework was used in a case study on the daily life of miners in Pernik under capitalism (1878–1944).⁷ The choice of Pernik was not accidental. In the course of several decades it was transformed from a small village (1,000 residents in the 1880s) into an urban centre. The development of local coal deposits in 1891 sealed its future as Bulgaria's energy center. The first state-run mine opened in 1892 and the village gradually took on urban features. It became a town in 1929, and with its industries and railroad connection to the capital Sofia (1893) it turned into a magnet for migration. At the turn of the century the workers in the mines and in other local enterprises came directly from Pernik and the nearby villages, the majority being seasonal workers who took mining jobs in winter and worked their fields in the summer.⁸ A "rural" Pernik and an "urban" Pernik emerged on parallel tracks and the town was in fact a miners' village. The need for permanent labor motivated the mine's management (the mine was a state-owned business with autonomous rights) to pursue European-minded social policies. In order to attract a workforce, the mining company built new housing for its workers, engineers, and staff that formed a self-contained architectural urban space fashioned after Central-European models. To protect the health of its workers, the company created a climate-treatment facility not far from town (1929), an ambulatory care center, a sanitary service, and a hospital; canteens were provided for the miners and they received free coal supplies and lighting for their families, pensions based on length of service, bonuses for long-term work underground, and so on.⁹ The company maintained a mining school, kindergartens, day care centers, and schools for the miners' children. It provided clothes and a school canteen for pupils from poor families and summer camps for the miners' children.¹⁰ Rural Pernik was also urbanized with the efforts of the mining company: the town was equipped with water mains (1937) and sewerage was put in place for the miners' village (1928–1940), streets were built and paved, gardens and parks were

⁶ Vasilii Ivanovich Sinitsin, "Formirovanie komunisticheskogo bita," *Kommunist* 11 (1963): 67, quoted by Detelina Moskova, "Za etnografskoto izuchavane na rabotnicheskii bit u nas," *Izvestiia na EIM* 8 (1965): 231; idem, *Byt epohi stroitel'stva kommunizma* (Moscow: Nauka, 1960), 13.

⁷ See Ivanichka Georgieva, "Bitit na perniskite min'ori (1878–1944)," *Izvestiia na Bilgarskoto istoricheskoto druzhestvo* 30 (1977): 181–219.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 187–88.

⁹ *50 godini mini Pernik (1891–1941). Iubileen sbornik* (Sofia: Dirzhavni mini, Knipegraf, 1941), 284–97.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 362–77.

created that have been preserved to this day, a theater and a cinema were built, and music bands were set up (for wind, string and jazz music).¹¹ Population numbers boomed from 12,296 in 1926 to 28,545 in 1946.¹²

At the same time the town saw the spreading influence of Marxism and the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party (narrow socialists). In the early twentieth century Pernik was a hotbed of worker strikes. The prominent social democratic and communist leader Georgi Dimitrov commanded a strong personal influence.¹³ The town was one of the centers of the brigadier movement.¹⁴ For a while it was named Dimitrovo (1959–1962) after Georgi Dimitrov and became a model town for an industrial socialist city and socialist industrialization. Population growth reached its peak between 1946 and 1965, with numbers increasing from 28,545 (in 1946) to 59,930 (in 1956) and then 75,844 (1965).¹⁵

The EIM/BAN Research Archive has preserved the field material from the above-mentioned collective study of the working class in Pernik (AEIM, Inv. #222-II, 233-II, 237-II–249-II), which represents a set of sources about the social origin, professional specialization, family, family relations, housing, clothing, the holiday system, and other characteristics of Pernik workers during the socialist period, an invaluable cache for “remembering communism.” The objectives of the research project were set out by Detelina Moskova, a member of the collective team for Pernik:

It is necessary to elucidate how the forms of daily life among workers came into being at a given stage of social development. A similar principle of consistent historicism underpinned the study of Pernik as an industrial center. The subjects of research included the mine, the machine-building plant, and the Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, which were created entirely under the new socialist conditions.¹⁶

The project involved two stages: preselection of worker families and field work. The archive materials do not contain information on the selection process.

¹¹ Ibid., 367–70; Ivan Todorov, “Predi da stane grad, v seloto e imalo teatr; Pîrviiat dukhov orkestîr v Bîlgariia e sîzdaten v Pernik,” *Trud Daily*, 5 November 1998, 4.

¹² “Pernik,” in *Entsiklopediia na Bîlgariia*, vol. 5, ed. Vladimir Georgiev (Sofia: BAN, 1986), 155.

¹³ Mikhail Anachkov, *Vodachîi na pernîshkite rudnichari Temelko Nenkov i revoliutsionnoto rabotnîchesko dvîzhenie v Pernik (1905–1925)* (Pernik: Municipal Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party, 1986), 200.

¹⁴ The first phase of the brigadier movement was in 1946–1950. *Trideset godini brigadirsko dvîzhenie na grad Pernik. Doklad, iznesen ot Pîrvia sekretar na OK na DKMS na tîrzhestveno sîbranie—sîbor na 9 dek. 1977 god. v gr. Pernik* (Sofia: Partizdat, 1977); see also Radost Ivanova, “Stroim za narodnata republika. Mladezhkite stroitelni brigadi—shkola za komunîstîchesko vîzpitanie,” in *Sotsializmî: realnost i iliuzii. Etnologîchni aspekti na vsekidnevната kultura. Dokladi ot mezhdunarodna nauchna konferentsiia*, eds. Radost Ivanova, Ana Luleva, and Rachko Popov (Sofia: EIM/BAN, 2003), 54–62.

¹⁵ Andrei Tsakmanov, “45 godini Pernîshki okrîg,” *Sîpernik*, 15–23 January 2004, 4.

¹⁶ Moskova, “Za etnografskoto izuchavane,” 233, 234.

A feasible guess however is that the families were short-listed locally (by the town's administrative and party leadership) according to certain requirements. The proposal listed 132 worker families from the following age groups: young families (under thirty-five years), middle-aged families (under forty years) and old families divided in two subgroups: regular people and prominent people. The latter were brigadiers, decorated workers, and "heroes of socialist labor": the working-class élite in the socialist period.

A scoping field exercise followed in 1960. It involved two site visits to the short-listed families to make the final selection. The exercise produced two archive units (AEIM, Inv. #245-II, 246-II) containing "family files" that include mainly biographical information and a description of the family's living conditions. Many files end with the ethnographer's opinion whether or not the respective family should be included in the interviews. Here are some typical assessments:

On account of his socialist attitude to labor and for demonstrating heroism in the workplace, he was decorated with a golden Order of Labor (#21); A noteworthy impression was the library with many books and dictionaries. The daughter is attending Russian and French classes. An interesting family to observe and study (#12); Vestiges of patriarchal relations abound; the family is not suitable for research (#20); There is a sense of great cultural backwardness. They don't read newspapers, magazines, books (#5); The family is of interest only because they have many children; the living environment is totally rural and poor... the family is just joining the ranks of the working class (#6).

These recommendations clearly indicate that the selection ruled out families with a typical rural culture and focused on those who had separated from their rural roots and through their jobs in the mines and plants had gained economic prosperity. What was the "perfect" working class family to explore? Here are some examples:

The family of a miner, 36, a brigadier from the village of Tsîrnel [now part of the village of Lyulin—T. B.], a good worker. He has three brothers, all miners, and two sisters married to miners. They speak enthusiastically about their lives and are confident of a better future: "I used to wear one plain shirt [*koshulii*] until my first grade at school.... We used to lie in the hay and now even the old folks sleep on springs" (#70); A long-time miner, currently paid chairman of a trade union, married to the daughter of the miner and revolutionary Iglev, an associate of Georgi Dimitrov, member of REMS [the Workers' Youth Union]. A very progressive family, very suitable for research (#78).

The quoted passages clearly indicate the set of preliminary requirements for the selection process, the aim being to demonstrate the positive influence of socialism on the life of workers. A new definition was coined—"progressive" person, "progressive" families—to denote the proponents of communist ideology who exhibited a positive attitude to the "rule of the people." The term was

applied to judge all Bulgarian citizens during the communist period depending on their proximity to, or distance from, that ideology. Its use enabled a politically correct descriptive style.

The preselection process led to the inclusion of 106 families in the research project "for observation." Another 26 were left out and information about them is kept in a separate archive unit (AEIM, Inv. #244). The actual field work involved a questionnaire which is not available, but it is possible to reconstruct the content. The questionnaire was divided in two general parts. The first one, "Spiritual and Social Culture," covered lineage, place of residence, age group, social background and professional occupation, years of employment, political affiliation, family structure and composition, education, cultural interests, family customs and calendar holidays, daily life in the family and family relations (including relations between spouses, attitudes about children and education, relations between siblings, parents, and relatives). The second part, "Material Culture," looked at distribution of tasks between family members, income and savings, housing, clothing, food and eating habits, hygiene, medical care, alcohol consumption.

The field records represent biographical interviews on these topics supplemented with descriptions of the observed family relations, the home and its interior, food and eating habits, hygiene, holidays and entertainment. Of particular value are the results of long direct observation. The families were visited several times, sometimes on great Christian holidays (Easter, Christmas) to observe the religious behavior of their members.

The key impression from the field materials in the EIM archive is that the interviews followed the questionnaire, with occasional quotations of important phrases uttered by the informants. The accounts are enhanced by the observations, assessments, and impressions of the interviewer. The outcome is a blended content where the original information appears side by side with the researcher's assessments or even judgments. Therefore, the field materials cannot be considered as an authentic source. They are a mixture of facts and observations about the surveyed families refracted through the perceptions of EIM ethnographers about what a worker's home, socialist family, and work attitude should look like. The content of the documents is not only about the personal and family communicative memory, which is autobiographical, but also about collective memory, which functions in the form of systems of signs subsumed under the common notion of "memoria" (rites, legends and myths, the home, clothing), or cultural memory.¹⁷ Field records cannot be understood simply as text: they fall in the context of cultural memory transmitted in the family and the local environment. They also reflect the efforts of the Communist Party and the state to impose a new "socialist" culture and daily life.

¹⁷ Jan Assmann, *Kulturnata pamet* (Sofia: Planeta 3, 2001), 49–50.

The most valuable property of these sources is that they provide a snapshot of the behavior of workers and their families at the time of the field study in the context of their social and local background, occupation, and place of residence (a town, a village) under the impact of the economic and cultural policies of the Communist Party and the state. The section of the interviews dealing with the social background of the informants reveals increased Pernik-bound migration of poor and middle peasants chiefly from the nearby villages and regions (around Trîn, Breznik, Radomir, Kyustendil), as well as from more distant parts of the country. A specific development of land ownership in Bulgaria in the first half of the twentieth century was the trend for growing numbers of petty land holdings. According to 1946 data, 37.5% of farmers owned less than fifty decares and 39% possessed up to a hundred decares.¹⁸ Rural population reached 5 million in 1920–1944 and the majority had no prospects outside the villages. Peasants could not benefit from the job market in the cities because the pace of industrial development was lagging behind the natural reproduction rate of rural populations. Workforce monitoring surveys in the 1930s estimated a “surplus” of 1 million people in the overpopulated agricultural areas.¹⁹ Two-thirds of farm holdings had a smaller annual income compared to the average earnings of industrial and construction workers in the cities. Before the creation of cooperative farms, the villages around Breznik, Radomir, Pernik, and Kyustendil were experiencing agrarian overpopulation. Traditional petty farming and herding was organized in family units comprised of small (one married couple and its children) or complex families (one married couple and the families of one or more of their married sons). They practiced sustainable survival strategies adapted to the local natural environment and the economic activities of the family: cohabitation, a strong power of the father (father-in-law), collective work and collective consumption based on the principle of division of labor into “men’s” and “women’s” work, collective childcare within the family and upbringing into values, norms of behavior and notions about the surrounding world that stemmed from the correlation peasant–land (personal property)–labor. Demographic reproduction in the villages was maintained through local endogamy or through established marriage practices between certain villages. Economic constraints and crises caused by shortage of labor in the families were handled by mutual donations of labor and tools and self-aid between families, as well as by hiring additional hands in or outside the village. The villages

¹⁸ Nikolai Todorov et al., *Stopanska istoriia na Bilgarii 681–1981* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1981), 373. 1 decare (dca) is the standard land area measurement unit in Bulgaria and is equal to 10 acres (1,000 m²), or 0.1 hectare.

¹⁹ Anastas Totev, “Sistoianieto na prenaselenost v nasheto zemedelsko stopanstvo,” *Spisanie na ikonomichesko druzhestvo* 34, no. 6 (1940): 353–84. For more detailed information about the process of fragmentation of ownership and the overpopulation in rural regions, see Todorov et al., *Stopanska istoriia*, 373–76.

thus developed local specifics in their economic specialization, paraphernalia (the home, furniture, clothes, foods), customs and holidays, which found expression in particular features distinguishing them from “others.” These lasting features of social relations and cultural memory are reflected in the interviews of workers from Pernik and the neighboring villages.²⁰

As mentioned earlier, the village and the peasants as a social category changed entirely during the socialist period in Bulgaria as a result of the enforced Stalinist-like reorganization. That theme was explored by various anthropological studies of local communities under socialism.²¹ Economic coercion of peasants began already in the 1940s when agricultural production was taken away from them through requisitions.²² The interviews have preserved the memory of resistance against requisitions and the punishment inflicted by the Communist Party on its “own” (i.e., BCP members).²³ Between 1948 and 1958 peasants were forced “voluntarily” (through economic coercion and physical violence) to “enter” their land in the TKZS cooperative farms.²⁴ The organization of the coops put in practice the party theory about workers being the hegemonic class. Miners who were Communist Party members became TKZS

²⁰ For instance, Asen S. P., the father of Lozan Stanev (miner), was born in 1904 in Pernik in a well-off rural family. His father and his father’s brothers (six men) broke up into separate households. Three more brothers and a sister were born later. The family was not rich. They had thirty to forty decares of cultivated land, a pair of oxen, two horses, and seventy to eighty sheep. At a very early age Asen had to look for additional keep outside. In 1916 he became a tailor’s apprentice in Pernik. He learned the trade until 1922, when he started his own shop. In 1923 he married Kremena. The four brothers divided the property in 1925. Asen moved out in 1928 and was taken in as a son-in-law in the home of Kremena’s father, where there were no sons. Soon afterwards he started working in the mine (L. S., 1924, Pernik, Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, head of workshop, 232-II, 16). I. S. married in 1945 and lived with his father until 1947. Everyone slept in the barns. Only the father and the mother slept in the house. They slept on bunks covered with straw and used hemp rugs to cover their bodies. “Now we all sleep on spring beds with mattresses and use duvets and blankets. At home we used to sit on little tripod stools, and now there isn’t any of those around” (I. S, miner, 1925, Railovo village, 223-II, 15).

²¹ Gerald W. Creed, *Domesticating Revolution: From Socialist Reform to Ambivalent Transition in a Bulgarian Village* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998); Deema Kaneff, *Who Owns the Time? The Politics of Time in a Model Bulgarian Village* (New York: Oxford & Berghahn Books, 2004).

²² Iskra Baeva and Evgeniya Kalinova, *Bilgarskite prekhodi 1939–2005* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 103.

²³ According to A. S., 40, a miner from Railovo, his father “had always had progressive ideas.” In 1918 he served as secretary of the party group in the village. Persecuted “under Stamboliiski,” he signed up for work in the mine under a false name because “otherwise he wouldn’t get the job.” After 9 September 1944 he did not immediately join the Communist Party. Later he joined the party, but he was expelled because he refused to give free supplies under mandatory procurement for the government (222-II, 6–7).

²⁴ Vladimir Migeve et al., *Istoriia na Bilgariia 681–1960*, vol. 2 (Sofia: Arges, 1995).

chairmen and worked for the enforcement of the Communist Party policies in the village, while the mine was still paying their wages. Once their party assignment was completed, the miners returned to their jobs. The Bulgarian peasants, whose life strategy was to set up their own farm on their own land, experienced a profound life crisis. The reform met with disapproval and resistance waged mostly by the older generation. The liquidation of private property and the “entry” of the family’s land in the cooperative farms pitched parents and children against one another.²⁵ Many communist workers were expelled from the party because of the “wrong” behavior of their relatives. These events were part of personal and family traumatic memory and were reflected in the interviews. More by way of exception, there are individual accounts of positive feelings about TKZS cooperatives and voluntary entry of land belonging to complex families.²⁶

The development of Pernik as an energy, metallurgy, and machine-building center was in unison with the policy of stepped-up industrialization launched in 1949–1953.²⁷ To become professional miners, metallurgy workers, and machine-builders was often the best chance of survival for young people from the poorest rural segment, the landless peasants.²⁸ The socialist period saw the construction of a modern road network and the state enterprises provided regular transportation to and from the neighboring villages. This was the end of the

²⁵ A. S. was a party member and even a party secretary, but because he “failed to agitate and win over his father to join the TKZS coop, he was expelled from the Bulgarian Communist Party.” After they joined the TKZS, he was urged to reapply for party membership, but he did not care to do it. “I have no political interests, plus I feel easier like this; I have more freedom” (223-II, Dren, 30). The brother of A. S., a miner, had “peculiar ideas.” When his father joined the cooperative farm, the brother kicked him out of the house. The father was devastated and wished to kill himself. A. S. asked him to come and live with him, but the father did not want to take the offer. “He was ashamed because he had treated this son (A. S.) very badly” (222-II, 19).

²⁶ As a boy Khristo P., the father of Asen P., worked on the farm where work was divided between the brothers. He was the shepherd and the others took care of the land and the horses. In 1916 he took a job on the Sofia–Kyustendil railway line. In 1917 he joined the mine as a digger. After he served his time in the army, he returned to the mine. In 1930 he left the mine and started working on the farm. After 9 September 1944, when a TKZS farm was established in their village, he told his brothers they should all join in. They joined the TKZS together, just as they had worked their land together. He has worked as a shepherd at the TKZS farm since 1950 (A. P., 1921, miner, Railovo, 222-II, 77).

²⁷ Iliana Marcheva, “Za granitsite v nai-novata bilgarska istoriia ili za otnoshenieto ‘politika’—‘ikonomika’ ot kraia na 40-te i prez 50-te godini,” in *Granitsata v istoriata*, ed. Kostadin Grozev (Sofia: LIK 1999), 145; Baeva and Kalinova, *Bilgarskite prekhodi*, 101–4.

²⁸ Mehmed was born in 1925 in the village of Rusalia, Tŭrnovo district, in a very poor farmhand family. Neither his grandfather nor his father had any land. He lost his father when he was a little boy. He started working when he was 10, taking farmhand jobs in winter and in summer. Sabriye is from the same village. She was born in 1925 in a landless Turkish family whose members always worked for others (M. A., 1925, miner and digger, 228-II, 72).

mixed social category of temporary (seasonal) workers in Pernik, who were also farmers; instead, a steady category of workers living in the villages was created. Their wives worked on the cooperative farm. The town now had a segment of miners of several generations whose fathers and grandfathers were the first miners, mechanics, and machine operators hired as temporary workers at the mine and associated enterprises. There were families where several brothers worked in the mines and their sisters were married to miners. Marrying a miner became prestigious. Career growth was tied with political membership in the Bulgarian Communist Party and involved preparation of party members in party schools and schools for economic managers.²⁹ The party could “reedify” its members, sending them to run TKZS farms or to act as managers of plants and enterprise departments. Membership in the Communist Party oiled one’s progress up the professional ladder and was a sure bet for attaining prestigious social standing. But there are also cases when some communists quit the party ranks due to disagreement with the party secretaries and the party policy and then refused to renew their membership.³⁰ Descriptions of workers use the term “a man of progressive ideas” as well as the phrase “he has correct positions on political matters.” The group of “progressive nonparty members (*bezpartiiini*)” was favorably looked upon.

The interviews give clear expressions of the workers’ attitude toward the new ruling party and its policy. Their attitude was articulated along the opposition “before” versus “now” and had to do with the social memory of the miners about the working conditions and the production technologies “before” and “after” 9 September 1944. What follows is an extract from the professional biography of a miner who had been at his job for more than twenty years:

He arrived as a general hand at the mine in Tvirditsa. The working and living conditions there were even harder. The owner used a whip to drive them to the mine. They ate on their feet and washed in a gully. They lived in a basement plagued by lice. After several months he returned to his village. In 1942 he took on a job at the mine [in Pernik]. The working conditions in the mine before 9 September 1944 were so bad I. Z. said he many times regretted having

²⁹ In Pernik L. S. rubbed shoulders with “class-aware workers who helped for his correct political orientation.” He joined the Communist Party in 1944. He worked at the mine until 1951, when he was seconded to serve as chairman of a TKZS cooperative. At present he is a member of the TKZS managing board and a subchairman (L. S., 1924, head of workshop, Pernik, Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, 232-II, 16).

³⁰ Before 9 September 1944, I. Z. was involved in the underground resistance and was detained by the police more than once. I. Z. was a member of the communist party from 1944 until 1951 when he quit following an argument with the party secretary. He was invited to rejoin the party but was told to reapply, whereas he wanted his membership to continue as he had not committed any offences. At the mine he had been party supervisor and deputy head of shift. He was active under the Fatherland Front and a member of a mining trade union, and of various interest clubs (I. Z., 1916, miner, Pernik, 228-II, 32, 35–36).

become a miner. After that he never regretted it again. Until 1944 the mining conditions were miserable: "Everything was done manually, the whole place was dripping." After 9 September 1944, the vertical combine method was introduced for undermining earth layers, manual undermining was discarded, drills were launched into operation and the work of diggers was substantially relieved. Metal reinforcements were introduced; the miners stopped carrying "trees" [wooden supports] and started using transportation machines. "Now it feels like working and singing." He is optimistic about "a better future." I. Z. believes the working conditions now and the living conditions in general are getting better and better. It was all brought to him by "Granny Mine" so he has no regrets he has become a miner. (I. Z., b. 1916, miner, Pernik, 228-II, 25–27, 30–31, 32–33)

There are lots of similar stories. Being a miner was not a worthy social category in the memories that reflect the time "before" socialism. Calling the miner's place of work by the kinship term "Granny Mine" (*Baba Mina*) betrays a feeling of closeness and emotional attachment. What is the reason behind this feeling? Working conditions, occupational safety, and the organization of the mining process were all improved during the socialist period, as well as wages which garnered the highest income levels among all other worker jobs in Pernik. This was particularly true for diggers who received the highest pay. A digger's wage could reach BGN 170–220 (in some cases BGN 400)³¹ against the pay levels of foundry workers who had lower wages of about BGN 120–170.³² The miner's wage was considered "net money" because of other economic benefits like bonuses for shock-workers (*udarnitsi*), work clothes, free coal supplies, and cheap firewood. All workers used the social benefits of cheap transportation and cheap food in the mine or plant canteens. On average, a regular miner would get BGN 90–120, and a regular female worker at the plant earned BGN 70–100. Office jobs in the enterprises paid BGN 50–70. Worker wages in Pernik were quite high compared to the general pay levels in the coun-

³¹ S. K.'s digging job earned him BGN 1,500 (in 1961; 150 in 1962) and sometimes as much as BGN 4,000 (in 1961; 400 in 1962). His wife had 600 workdays on the TKZS farm in previous years and 150 workdays that year. Her job paid mostly in kind with maize, wheat, potatoes, green beans (no quantities were mentioned) (S. K., 1921, miner, 223-II, 56). V. I., a miner, earned an average net wage of BGN 220. In addition to that, he received free work clothes, two tons of coal a year, and cheap firewood (1 lev per cart from the wooden mine supports) (G. S., miner, Pernik, 241-II, 4–5). A. B. had an average monthly wage of BGN 1,700 (in 1960; 170 in 1962). He also received two tons of coal for free, a discount travel pass, discounts at the mine's canteen, free work clothes and access to the mine's bathrooms, summer holiday cards for Varna at the Black Sea and for Virshets in the mountains (A. V., miner, 1916, Meshtitsa, 224-II, 4).

³² B. M made on average BGN 150 a month and his wife got BGN 100. The mother received a monthly pension of BGN 15 for war disability. The two salaries and the pension were put together in a shared fund. While they were working at the Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, the two brothers contributed BGN 30 each to the family budget for food, housing and light. Husband and wife get work clothes and use the plant's bathrooms. Almost every year they both received holiday cards, which was a relief on the family budget (B. M., 1929, worker, Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, 232-II, 27).

try. Free medical care, free education, prophylactic health-care facilities, and mountain and seaside vacations in the new vacation homes run by the miners' trade unions, changed the miners' self-esteem. Recognition of the workers' achievements through awards, decorations, and other forms of acknowledgment (boards of honor, honorary titles) was a specific policy of the socialist state and followed the ideological dictums about the "hegemonic class." After the Soviet fashion, an entire system of labor decorations was set up, including the titles of "honored miner," "best on the job," "medal for distinguished labor," "hero of socialist labor" and many others, which brought additional income, longer leave days, free vacations, business trips or excursions abroad, etc. All that formed a group of "prominent" workers.

The economic and social position of peasants was vastly different. The peasants who were cooperative members and worked on the TKZS farms earned the lowest income. The interviews create the impression that they were paid for their work in agricultural goods and money that could not cover their families' subsistence. One new development that was received well by the farmers was the legal settlement of pensions for peasants. As noted in the interviews, however, comparisons between miners' and TKZS cooperative members' pensions reveal a substantial difference in the value of labor. The pensions of retired miners were several times higher than those of peasants. Real family income cannot be determined without taking into account the tradition of shared income in complex and extended families, where the "young ones" and daughters in particular did not contribute their earnings to cover common expenses. Many workers were receiving farm products from their rural parents, which also contributed to a higher real income. One particularly significant aspect for the higher self-esteem of workers was the chance to continue their education and to attend higher educational establishments. The life stories of the workers show their much-improved economic position compared to the past. The cooperative peasants stood at the other end of the income bracket, which caused continuous waves of migration to the city and a demographic crisis in the villages.³³

The records identify the introduction of a new form of labor organization. Until 1950 the miners worked and were paid under personal employment contracts with the mining company. After that the basic form of organization (and control) of production became the brigade. The miners worked in shifts against output targets whose growing demands caused discontent. The brigades were headed by a front man (brigadier) and their members included regular workers, honored miners, and shock-workers (*udarnitsi*). The brigade itself could be a regular one, a "youth labor brigade," "a socialist labor brigade," or "a commu-

³³ Boika Vasileva, *Migratsionnite protsesi v Bilgariia sled Vtorata svetovna voina* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1991), 78–79, 108–11. On land cooperation and migration in a village in North-West Bulgaria, see Creed, *Domesticating Revolution*, 133–34.

nist labor brigade.” This was a specific form of subordination of the worker’s private interest to the collective interest (of the brigade, the enterprise, the “party”). The collective organization assumed collective responsibilities and faced collective penalties: achievement of the plan without glitches and incidents brought additional remuneration, whereas incidents resulted in pay cuts for all brigade members. The organization of labor involved “exchange of experience” with miners from the USSR. In addition to their productive function, the brigades also performed social and ideological functions. They were a channel for the mine’s party leadership to promote ideological “education” among the miners in clubs about the history of the Bulgarian and Russian communist parties and discussions of papers from their various congresses. There were attempts to make the miners a role model for the “youth.” The mining brigade made an agreement with the students from a local school in Pernik, where the miners undertook to overachieve their annual plan and the students promised to finish the school year without poor grades. One of the most famous groups was the Trînska Brigade led by G. G.: its members not only worked together but also helped each other by building houses for their families. The brigade replicated in the workplace a widespread tradition in Bulgarian villages where a family would build its own house by mobilizing labor and mutual aid from relatives and neighbors.³⁴

The analyzed field records offer an “insider’s look” at the process of “engineering” a working class according to the principles and goals of the Communist Party and its economic policies in the first two decades of communist rule. This “engineering” ensured that the industrialization and modernization of the country will be effected by workers who had the economic benefits and the social privilege to work in the mines and in the industry. The income policy strove to incite their positive attitude toward the “rule of the people” and communist ideas. The impression from the field records is that the task was achieved, especially with respect to the “prominent” miners and metallurgy workers. These same interviews, however, clearly indicate a strict control over the production process and the ambition of the party and the administration to boost intensive labor by establishing production plans, increasing output targets (the amount one worker must produce in one day), achievement of Five-Year Plans (the so-called *petiletka*). The positive perception of socialism reflected in the field studies can be largely explained by the personal life paths of the workers that in turn go back to their selection. These personal perceptions seem to reflect the state of Bulgaria’s economy in the period of “communal capitalism” (“capitalism without capital”).³⁵

³⁴ Doroteia Dobрева, “Da postroish sobstven dom. Za upotrebat na sotsialnite mrezi v sotsialisticheskoto selo,” in *Sotsializmit: realnost i ilyuzii: Etnologichni aspekti na vsekidnevната kultura*, eds. Radost Ivanova, Ana Luleva, and Rachko Popov (Sofia: EIM/BAN, 2003), 63–75.

³⁵ Rumén Avramov, *Komunalniat kapitalizím, vol. 1: Kapitalizím bez kapital* (Sofia: Fondatsiia Bîlgarska nauka i kultura, 2007).

While the “engineering” of the working class was generally successful, the main challenge to the economic policy was the village, which was undergoing a process of “successful dismantling.” The cooperative farms around Pernik, Trîn, and Breznik were created in semi-mountainous regions where the land was laboriously cultivated by family households struggling for their mere subsistence, and where the terrain was much more suitable for livestock breeding. A survey of TKZS operations in the region would have captured the actual picture of economic crisis and depopulation caused by their establishment. The reproduction of the Soviet model dictating inclusion of the entire land area in cooperative farms regardless of its kind and economic qualities, triggered a sector-wide crisis in this part of Bulgaria. The new economic situation turned “upside down” the traditional age-old notions of social status among peasants. They centered on one’s “own” farm created with the work of the family and the legacy of its forefathers, a degree of distance from formal power, and prestige confined within the local community. Working “for others” was a sign of poverty and was not prestigious. The peasants lost more than their land; they lost their self-esteem because their work was underappreciated. The perceptions of socialist economic development until the early 1960s reflected in the field materials are not unambiguous. The memory of workers and peasants holds both positive and traumatic events, and in the later decades these colored the overall memories of communism.

The creation of a new economic and social environment conducive to the development of socialism was only one objective of Communist Party policies. The totalitarian nature of the communist regime was made evident in its policy of creating a “new socialist man” and a “new socialist family.” The field materials show that the families of workers coming from the villages generally followed the model of the complex and extended family. Most of them broke away from the authority of their parents only by coming to the city, where they established their individuality, while a smaller part continued to live with their parents, finding their place in the traditional lifestyle of an extended family where they could count on financial support and assistance from the older generations. Marrying a miner was now a prestigious choice.

The key concept the government aimed to change concerned the “equal status of women” and it sought to overcome once and for all the rural division between male and female economic and social roles. The men’s higher social status explains why family preferences for the birth of a son persisted well into the 1950s. Yet rural women were actively involved in the main agricultural activities. Their daily routine involved a “double burden” (looking after the home and family, and work in the field).³⁶ The 1947 Constitution declared that

³⁶ Maria Todorova, “Istoricheska traditsiia i promeni v Bilgariia: zhenski ili feministichen problem?,” in *Zhenskite identichnosti na Balkanite*, eds. Krasimira Daskalova and Kornelia Slavova (Sofia: Polis, 2004), 114–19.

women have equal rights with men (article 72). Women were provided the right to work on an equal footing with men by getting equal pay for equal labor, as well as the right to recreation, social security, pensions, and education; marriage and the family were placed under the tutelage of the state. In this manner the state was directly involved in the regulation of family relations.³⁷

The interviews with workers touched upon the family, the relations between spouses, childcare, and the education of children. The husband who was the head of the family is described as being “progressive” or “backward” depending on his sticking to—or emancipation from—his macho role typical for the rural setting. The working woman, the “manly girl” participating in the production process at the plant or the mine, was the new “socialist woman.”³⁸ Family and her relations with her husband came second, and childcare and the attitude toward children, both boys and girls, came third. At first it seems that boys and girls enjoyed the same attitude in the younger families, but some isolated phrases about passing down the family house³⁹ indicate the son had precedence when inheritance was concerned. The interviews implied the woman’s traditional role in the family: she had to take care of the children, the home, and the clothes of the family, and she had to prepare food, all along the list of functions determined by the notion of “female” work in the past. The questions were phrased in such a manner as to reveal to what extent these relations had changed toward “equality.” They asked whether the husband was “helping his wife” with the household chores, particularly in looking after the children, which was appreciated as a merit (it was not the “man’s role” in the past). The wording seeks to suggest that there was change, but the reality was far more complicated—there were “modern” men who were considerate and respectful of their wives as well as others who stressed their position of power. There were women who were fatigued with life and had no particular desires, the most significant event for them being the wedding of their daughters. Many interviews reveal the persistent traditional role of grandmothers in raising and educating children. The records voice the families’ desires for their children “to get educated,” “to complete higher education,” or “not to be miners.” Such family strategies about the future of their children betray the limited status of the parents’ occupations sup-

³⁷ Ana Luleva, “Zhenskiiat vîpros v sotsialisticheska Bîlgariia—ideologiia, politika, realnost,” in *Sotsializmî: realnost i ilyuzii: Etnologichni aspekti na vsekidnevната kultura*, eds. Radost Ivanova, Ana Luleva, and Rachko Popov (Sofia: EIM/BAN, 2003), 155–74.

³⁸ Iliyana Marcheua, “Mîzhkite momicheta v krîgovete na promenite: bilgarkata prez vtorata polovina na XX vek,” in *Granitsite na grazhdanstvoto: evropeiskite zheni mezhdu traditsiata i modernostta*, eds. Krasimira Daskalova and Raina Gavrilova (Sofia: LIK, 2001), 318–31, here 319.

³⁹ The father thought that all children had equal rights over the house. When they get married, the girls can stay and live there, but “they will never claim a share” (A. S., 1918, miner, 222-II, 14).

ported by their good income, but standing relatively low in the overall social hierarchy of Bulgarian society during the socialist period. The “learned heads,” who in the eyes of workers and peasants did not “work” because their labor was not (physically) “arduous,” were a dream category for the workers. For the same reason one of the most popular pep talks parents were giving their children at that time was: “Learn so you needn’t have to work.”

The field study in Pernik took place when new urban-based housing was being constructed. Possessing a family home was a symbol of total social accomplishment both in the villages and in the cities. It remained a chief goal for worker families. A new type of urban housing began to emerge in the early decades of the twentieth century, but its roll-out on a massive scale coincided with the period of the field study. In terms of materials and layout it was a cross between urban (in its planning, size, and materials) and rural homes (the functions of the rooms and interior) built by the family itself. Its description took on the new urban names of the rooms and the home was now furnished with pieces produced outside the family. Another large group of housing options were state-owned apartments (“prefabricated buildings”) let out to workers. The interviews describe the modernization of homes, lauding the retreat of rural features and the introduction of modern urban furniture and fabrics made in the market instead of colorful homespun fabrics and decorations typical of rural homes. The same goes for the availability of cutlery, electrical household appliances for cooking and cleaning, and radio and television sets. Another characteristic feature of this new housing was the specialization and functionality of individual, optimally occupied space: a bedroom for the parents, a room for the children, a living room, a kitchen, instead of everyone clustering in one or two rooms reminiscent of the habitation model in the rural house (the room with the hearth). The house was the most valuable possession of the family. It was built with the support of relatives and coworkers from the mine or the plant to last for a long time. Rented housing (apartments) owned by the state (the plant, the municipality) evoked a different attitude. Often apartments were shared between two families, a typical feature during the early socialist period. Many families considered these apartments the most modern type of housing because they provided all conveniences—electricity, bathrooms, sewerage. The new housing, a rented room or apartment, replaced one’s own house. The whole concept of “one’s own house” was being revised. Some of the interviewed families believed their life “on rent” was an interim period before building their own house. Possessing a home of one’s own was the highest benchmark of social standing. The interviews reflect comparisons between rooms and houses inhabited by the workers in the villages and in Pernik, where the new types of housing are favored for their living standards, conveniences, and aesthetic value. That added yet another opposition to the rift between “before” and “now”: the opposition between the “old” and the “new” home. The comparison was in fa-

vor of socialism. The rural house as a cultural model started to fade. The urbanization process which affected the outlook of the city was not unique to Pernik. Similar developments were taking place in other parts of the country.

Clothing was another major aspect of the field study. The mining workers had already started to shed their rural outfits in the early twentieth century. By the 1950s the process had affected both the city and the nearby villages. At the beginning of the 1960s clothes demonstrated the general consumption dynamics under socialism. Rural clothing was homespun and bore the features of the local community where it was made. Consumer goods were used as a finishing touch to the rural male and female dress, modifying its formal parts and accessories. Rural types of clothing survived among older women (over 60) migrating from the villages. A transitional version of “homemade clothing” was to make garments according to urban designs from homemade fabrics produced and pieced together by the women in the family. A limited consumption of “urban-type clothes” involved tailoring the garments inside the family from materials bought out in the market. This was particularly popular for children’s clothes. The prevalent type of worker clothes and everyday wear was off-the-peg clothing or mass consumption goods. The workers in the mines and the plants (both men and women) received free work wear they used on the job. It had some specific characteristics—ordinary fabrics, standard cuts, abandonment of ties and soft hats, and a preference for caps, quilted jackets, and rubber shoes. The interviews discussed with special attention the use of bed linen, underwear, nightgowns, and pajamas, all little-used items in Bulgarian villages. The modernization process involved mass proliferation of urban formal dress in line with the day’s fashions; it was yet another sign of prestige, previously unattainable for workers because of their poverty. It was supplied from ready-to-wear male and female clothing made in Bulgaria. The workers now had not only everyday clothes but also formal dress, which was a tangible demonstration of their good income.

One conspicuous difference was the appearance of young women compared to women in the past: instead of plaits, young women now sported short haircuts following the urban fashion. The ethnographers who collected the interviews were left with the impression that “generally, the everyday clothes and formal dress used on holidays are not different from the outfits of the average woman in [the capital] Sofia, like office staff girls, young intelligent workers, and others.”⁴⁰ Consumption and modernization moved hand in hand. The “old” homespun and homemade clothes were kept in the family chests and were donned only on official holidays.

Another important aspect of workers’ culture described in the materials concerns food and eating habits. Observations discuss the role of consumption and

⁴⁰ V. M., born 1929, a worker at the Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, 232-II, 31.

the structure of family budgets of couples living in Pernik and in the nearby villages. Questions about the technology of food preparation/processing, seasonal diet, the daily rationing, and products for the children's meals were asked in all interviews. The home food reflected the local tradition in the workers' home villages. The types of food and food-consumption patterns in a rural culture depended on the family's output of agricultural crops and farm animals and the seasonal cycles of their cultivation/breeding.⁴¹ Bread as well as other cooked and uncooked foods are made from raw products grown by the family. Dairy products had an important place in the family's diet and meat consumption was regulated by religious and economic considerations.⁴² The ingredients of homemade foods in the villages were limited to the products produced in the family household.

In the cities food was no longer "one's own." The organization of labor and the social benefits provided by the mines and the industrial plants introduced unfamiliar or less familiar meals prepared by professional cooks at cheap prices. The products, recipes, and home-cooking techniques changed with the breakdown of dietary norms conditioned by Christianity. The launch of propaganda campaigns against the religious worldview in order to promote atheist education aimed to sever the link between eating habits and "religiosity" (observance of lent by the Christians, the preparation of ritual food for various holidays). The state put utmost efforts to end the preparation and use of festive foods for various Christian holidays. The workers' families consumed food that was high in calories and included meat, milk, butter, oil, baked goods, and sweets. Most foodstuffs were market goods whose consumption was planned and accounted for in the family. At the time when the field records were collected, a radical change was taking place in the amount and composition of food as well as in eating habits. The change was best summed up by one informant: "Before they were more concerned about their work, now they are concerned with food."⁴³

A significant facet of the modernization policy with respect to the "socialist man" was to build modern habits of personal and household hygiene. Field ob-

⁴¹ Tania Boneva, "Ekologiya i traditsii," in *Kulturna ekologiya* (Sofia: Lotos and Traian Kolev, 1997), 317–34.

⁴² Idem, "Kulinarniia triigilnik pri bilgarite," in *Sbornik izsledvaniia v chest na prof. Ivan Marazov*, ed. Kostadin Rabadziev (Sofia: IK Anubis, 2002), 164–73.

⁴³ The main meals were prepared according to traditional local recipes. In winter they preferred roast and fried pork with pickles and *banitsa* on the side. In spring they had lamb, mostly roasted; in summer they had cooked meals with meat and vegetables; and in autumn they had vegetables and local meals (various stews and meals in earthenware casserole [*giuvech*]). The basic thing for all meals is fried onions and red peppers with plenty of watery sauces (I. V., 1932, metallurgy worker, Tsirkva [Daskalovo], 232-II, 105). They had a negative attitude toward alcohol because they had seen enough of it with Stoil's father, who was a heavy drinker. They all drank, but they preferred beer. They drank a liter of *rakia* every month, when they had guests (S. K., 1921, Tsarnel, miner, 223-II, 62).

servations describe eating habits, attitudes about the home's cleanliness, the family's clothes, and personal hygiene. They identified the impact of habits created in the workplace, where the workers used free bathrooms and ate in worker canteens using modern forks, knives, and dishes. This contributed to overcoming the archaic habits of rural families where everyone ate from a shared pot using wooden spoons, as well as the lack of running water or scarce quantities of water due to the lack of water supply systems in the villages and the limited scope of the water supply network in Pernik. The modernization of everyday habits in the worker families was uneven: some had preserved certain forms of shared eating and had "poorer hygiene" but there were others whose hygiene was "of a high standard."

The Communist Party and its propaganda enforced an atheist worldview by destroying "religious mentality" and the attending customs and holidays. The customs surrounding the birth of a child and its integration in the family community included an entire system of rites where the church was involved only with the child's baptism and christening. The authorities, however, exercised pressure in an attempt to ban not only baptism by the church, but also all customs and rites associated with the child. After civil marriage was made the only valid marital union in 1945, church marriage became unacceptable and was seen as a demonstration of religious feelings. The same pertained to the customs and holidays whose purpose was to ensure fertility and health, to keep the integrity of the village community (reunions and offerings of gratitude [*kurban*]), to part with dignity with the deceased and to keep their memory (funerals, memorial services and gatherings), to bring luck to buildings and construction, etc. All these events involved a Christian service performed by a priest inside or outside the church. Ironically, weddings, calendar rites and holidays, funerals and other events involved a much broader range of rituals, symbolic actions, and language that had nothing to do with the Christian canon and were even contrary to it. The communist agitators against "religion and superstition" were not familiar with the intricate system of customs and holidays and put pressure on generations of young and old to stop performing the "old" customs and holidays. The response was ambiguous: people either completely relinquished these customs, or reacted with mimicry. They respected the ban on going to church and attending Christian services performed by a priest, but the family reproduced the customs and rites it had learned from its parents: civil marriage was accompanied by wedding festivities and ceremonial food was prepared for Easter, Christmas Eve, St. George's Day, and other important local holidays. The customs where the participation of a priest and a religious service endured most persistently were funerals and memorial services for the dead. To some extent this was also the case with child baptism where the old family members (the grandmother) most often took the child to the church to be baptized "in secret." Parallel to that, the government started adapting some of the old holidays to the new real-

ity. For instance, St. George's Day was associated with rituals aiming to ensure fertility and health for sheep. Before the establishment of cooperative farms it was observed by all shepherd families. In the socialist period it became "Shepherd's Day" and was celebrated by the shepherds who worked for the TKZS farms. That marked the incipient inclusion of some aspects of tradition in the socialist holiday system. The "purity" of "atheist" socialist culture gave way to the gradual cooptation of tradition.⁴⁴

The total opposition between "old" and "new" was expressed in the question about "cultural interests" included in the field study questionnaire. During the socialist period the notions of "culture" and "socialist culture" were applied to all spheres of human behavior. The category of cultural interests encompassed meetings, gatherings, and clubs; reading newspapers, magazines, and books; participation in reading groups; going to the cinema and the theater; participation in artistic amateur groups (drama, dance troupes and folk music bands) organized by the traditional local community clubs (*chitalishte*, literally a "reading club") and by the House of Culture in Pernik; as well as attitudes about sports and tourism. By looking at the newspapers and magazines read by the families and at their book preferences, the ethnographers collected material about the sources that shaped the families' knowledge about the world and current events in Bulgaria. The most preferred books were on partisan, revolutionary topics as well as novels about the Soviet man (*How the Steel Was Tempered*), while the standard read for most women was the *Woman Today* magazine. Some adults (with primary education) built the habit of reading through the books their children studied at school. Children and young people were more active readers than their parents. There were admirers of classical music and jazz who took violin and accordion classes in music schools (since 1954); their interests were quite different from the interests of their parents. In 1962 the Palace of Culture in Pernik had eleven "artistic collectives" and seven children's troupes (AEIM, Inv. #249-II). The ethnographers compiled "information about children participating in music schools at the Palace of Culture," "whose parents were manual workers, chiefly in the mines and in the industrial plants." The information was about the 1962–1963 school year and listed the names of all workers' children. A separate description was made of the Pioneers' Palace in Pernik and the activities of its science and art clubs. The class approach in the organized education of young

⁴⁴ Iana Roideva, "Traditsiata v svremennata semeina praznichno-obredna sistema na bilgarite," *Problemi na kulturata* 5 (1981): 73–77; idem, "Gradt, seloto i modernizatsiata na praznichno-obrednata sistema na bilgarite prez vtorata polovina na XX vek," in *Problemi na svremennata etnografiia*, ed. Nadia Velcheva (Sofia: BAN, 2004), 141–78; Petr Petrov, "Mezhdu khristiianstvo i sotsializm—sinkretichni tendentsii v ritualnata kultura," *Bilgarski folklor* 3 (2000): 72–82; Kaneff, *Who Owns the Time?*, 144–48.

people and children is evident in the creation of a Station of Young Technicians at the Repairs Plant, the Lenin State Metallurgical Plant, the machine-building plant, and the Tolbukhin Mine. The station ran forty-seven technical clubs at local schools (for mechanics, turners, electrical engineers, miners, glass workers, radio engineers, amateur photographers, and firefighters) operating in school labs and workshops. The clubs covered 1,500 Pioneers (fourth through seventh graders; AEIM, Inv. #249-II, 20–21). Although it was not openly articulated, the close cooperation between students and workers aimed to steer children early on to the professions that made up the working class in Pernik. The workers and their brigades (especially the “communist labor brigades”) were the “party’s first assistant” in creating an interest in certain occupations and educating the young people to respect the labor and professions of workers. “Social engineering” in Pernik was well organized.

This paper cuts through several layers that reflect the institutionalized memory about socialism. First, there is the description of family and community memory. This was the social and cultural memory of peasants and a thin layer of workers whose common defining social characteristic was poverty. Second, there is the outline of economic modernization and social change until the 1960s brought about by industrialization policies. Industrialization was carried out by peasants migrating to the cities and experiencing a drastic social change. Migration was provoked by the crisis in agriculture after the creation of cooperative farms (TKZS), in turn preceded by a crisis in the peasants’ social and cultural identity. Economic and cultural modernization (turning peasants into workers and citizens) was carried out under specific political conditions. The attempt at an ideologically justified, total makeover of the economic and social system created the image of the respectable worker (“the man of labor,” the “maker of material goods”) who became a representative part of the new society enjoying an elevated economic and social status. Parallel to that, the policy of radical reform in the culture of the individual and the family strove to achieve a complete makeover of individuality by obliterating inherited cultural memory. A vacuum emerged between the official concept of society (socialism/communism) imposed by the party, and the real person. The material prosperity and modernization of personal life ran hand in hand with the forceful pressure for radical change of cultural memory and social behavior. This was the time of the most patent manifestation of total control⁴⁵ over the everyday life of Bulgarian people. Eric Hobsbawm defines historians as “the professional remembrancers of what their fellow citizens wish to forget.”⁴⁶ The specific out-

⁴⁵ For a discussion of socialism as a totalitarian system, see Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19–38.

⁴⁶ Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Extremes: The Short Twentieth Century, 1914–1991* (New York: Vintage Books, 1994), 103. Remembering communism was vastly different in life stories col-

look of ethnographers and anthropologists on everyday life and cultural memory makes them perhaps “the professional remembrancers of what their fellow citizens don’t wish to forget.”

lected in 2007 by an expedition of students in ethnology from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia/Sofia University. This postsocialist memory of socialism will be the subject of a future study.

15. “Remembering the Old City, Building a New One”: The Plural Memories of a Multiethnic City

Tamás Lönhárt and Virgiliu Țârău

In a city of East-Central Europe, where the inhabitants spoke Hungarian, Romanian, German, or Yiddish as their native language, prayed in churches of Orthodox, Catholic, Lutheran, Calvinist, Unitarian, or Jewish denominations for centuries, paradoxically (since communism is known for its official references to proletarian internationalism) ethnicity became the dominant frame for remembering communism, socialist industrialization, and the roles different groups played in social transformations. The language used by the local community's old and new leaders, traditional and new members, as well as the metamorphosis of national and historical symbols in the urban public space are important elements of the interviewees' narrative. They help determine who played the major role in conceiving and implementing the transformations these communities experienced. This city is also a place where children attended schools where Russian—the language of the homeland of the October Revolution—was no longer compulsory since as early as the mid-1960s. Homework was often written by candlelight, and a hot bath was somewhat of a “holiday.” Grandparents—who often stood in queues for food from dawn to sunset—told children legends about a medieval king born in this city, whose greatest virtue was his love for Truth. The king's statue was proudly exhibited on the central square but the public debate centered not on his belonging to the feudal aristocracy—a reactionary class according to the official perspective—but on his ethnicity. Churches, theaters, and university buildings dominated the city center as the industrial platform and the new workers' apartment buildings gradually encircled and outnumbered the city remembered by the traditional community. Rather than assimilating, the city was itself transformed by the very different community of the new inhabitants settled in as a result of socialist industrialization.

The present study was conceived as a common effort by two historians of different ethno-cultural backgrounds at the Babeș-Bolyai University of Cluj, seeking to understand the existing narratives about the transformation of the local

community under communism through critical analysis of the sources. The project's main goal was to analyze the ways in which social transformations between the late 1950s and the early 1980s are remembered and interpreted nowadays by members of the local community. The project was built on two separate stages. The first documented these transformations based on archival materials, statistics, and monographs related to the planning mechanisms, the stages, and the outcomes of the social engineering policies followed and the architectural changes made in Cluj-Napoca between the mid-1950s and the late-1980s. This set the comparative ground for the second part of our research: an analysis of the symbolic representations, perceptions, and interpretations of the narratives reflecting on these transformations. This second part is based on oral history interviews, and focuses on how the transformations associated with communism are reflected in people's life stories. In parallel, an analysis of how the transformations of the city-text between the mid-1950s and the late 1980s are interpreted nowadays, completes our research, focusing especially on the symbolic places, the lieu de mémoire, built in communist Romania.

In his reflections on the "origin and fate of memories,"¹ Lewis M. Barker stated that "oral historians," who study human memories as they are recalled years after being formed, are interested in three main questions. When and under what conditions is a memory first "acquired"? Under what conditions are memories "fabricated" or otherwise "reconstructed"? And how can one ascertain whether a recalled memory is "veridical," and, if it is not veridical, why not? Barker also distinguished between the "truthfulness of memory" (of *acquiring* correct perceptions, or "the memory as videotape") and "veridical memory" (which *reflects* accurately an event as it is remembered). He asserted that, since memory is a perception of reality, those who remember could experience and interpret the same realities differently. And since experience and the act of interpretation are both defined by human judgments, they are easily influenced by social factors. Such biased perceptions are therefore subsequently encoded into memory. Memories are also biased by the suggestive content of questionnaires. As a result, people's perceptions and memories are "easily led."² Likewise, as interviewees narrated their memories, they also constructed a narrative about their acts, while adopting specific positions and assuming roles. Remembering is thus

¹ Lewis M. Barker, "Learning Memory and Remembering History," http://www3.baylor.edu/Oral_History/Barker%20afterword.pdf.

² Lewis M. Barker, referring to the results of Elizabeth Loftus and her colleagues' experiments, which demonstrated the ways in which the researcher's verbal suggestions biased the recalling of memory, also emphasizes that the subjects of oral history interviews react not only to the questionnaire itself, but also to the context of the survey when constructing their narratives. "Oral historians" also acknowledge the influence of questionnaires. See *ibid.*, 148.

also a way of constructing identities, that is, defining who we are and what our relation with the world is. Oral history therefore gives rise to a methodological dilemma, which also poses a challenge to this enquiry into the process of "remembering communism" in a multiethnic community in Central and Eastern Europe.

The research upon which the present study is based was conceived by two colleagues who are both interested in the history of communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe, both of whom teach at the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, and who come from different generational and ethno-cultural backgrounds.³ The main project focused on the analysis of the various *transformations* that took place between the late 1950s and the early 1980s on a local level, and the way in which communism is now *remembered* and *interpreted* by members of a diverse urban community. It consisted of two stages. First, in order to evaluate the ways in which the transformations associated with communism are remembered by members of a certain community, we constructed a documented *referential* image of these transformations. An initial study thus comprised various sources (such as archives, statistics, monographs) referring to planning mechanisms, and to the stages and outcomes of social engineering policies and architectural changes in the city of Cluj from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s. This study provided a foundation for the second part of our research, concerning the *symbolic* level, which focused on the differentiated *perceptions* and *interpretations* present in the *narratives* about the transformations experienced by a specific community. This second part is based on oral history interviews, and focuses on the way in which the transformations associated with communism are reflected in the life stories narrated by the interviewees.

The city in which all the subjects of our oral history project lived at the time of the communist regime is inhabited by a multicultural community of Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, Jews, Gypsies, including a multi-religious community of Catholic (practicing both Roman and Greek rites), Protestant (Lutherans, Calvinists, Unitarians), Christian Orthodox, and Jewish (Orthodox, Neolog and Status-Quo) denominations that have a long history of cohabitation. Cluj is also an important regional center, which has changed its rulers more than once in the twentieth century, and which has played an important symbolic role in both modern Hungarian and Romanian nation-building processes.⁴ The social engineering policies of the communist regime caused a considerable increase in

³ The research was designed by Virgiliu Țârău and Tamás Lönhárt, members of the Romanian and Hungarian study project under the Chair of Contemporary History and International Relations at the Faculty of History and Philosophy of the Babeş-Bolyai University of Cluj, in the context of the larger project, entitled "Remembering Communism," led by Maria Todorova and Stefan Troebst and financed by the VolkswagenStiftung.

⁴ See also Holly Case, *Between States: The Transylvanian Question and the European Idea during World War II* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009).

industrial facilities and therefore the rapid growth of the population of the city, whereby a large number of rural inhabitants were relocated to the urban area. These processes also led to the transformation of the social structure and of the traditional balance between ethnic groups.⁵ These changes are reflected in the oral memories and offer insight into the wide range of perceptions and discourses of specific groups within the same community.

It is important that researchers are acquainted with the cultural milieu of the times in which memories were created before they could make a statement about whether they are “truthful” or not. Retrospectively, images are distorted by the impact of the subsequent biographies of interviewees. At the beginning of our research our intention was to analyze culturally biased memories, influenced by phenomena similar to the mechanisms of “psychological deafness” and “selective memory” described in Lewis M. Barker’s study.⁶ When reflecting about the “veridicality” of these memories it is important to note that memories are influenced by the specific positions of those who narrated events taking place toward the end of the Ceaușescu era. Such memories were generally recalled after a decade of conflicting public discourses,⁷ which also affected the metamorphosis of the symbolism of public places in Cluj.

The transformation that occurred in Cluj-Napoca (Kolozsvár in Hungarian, and Klausenburg in German⁸) provided the context in which the interviewee’s memories of communism were recalled. As Lewis M. Barker notes, the memories of the environment are inextricably bound to and learned in conjunction with the target memories in question.⁹ Hence we preferred to work on life stories rather than on other (targeted) interviews or questionnaires.

⁵ These transformations were presented in the first study summarizing the referential aspect of our research: Tamás Lönhárt and Virgiliu Țărău, “Remembering the Old City, Building a New One: Social, Ethnic and Architectural Transformations in a Multiethnic City during The Communist Regime, Cluj/Kolozsvár, 1956–1977,” unpublished manuscript, realized under the aegis of the research project “Remembering Communism.”

⁶ Barker, “Learning Memory and Remembering History,” 149.

⁷ See Rogers Brubaker, et al., *Nationalist Politics and Everyday Ethnicity in a Transylvanian Town* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006). See also the official statements of the city’s administrative leaders at that time, which offer insight into official reinterpretations and, in some cases, concepts with which the city’s “sites of memory” were constructed.

⁸ Both names were used officially before 1918, as the city was part of the Hungarian Kingdom, later of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. After 1918, its official name was Cluj. From 1940 to 1944, when it was once more part of the Hungarian state, Kolozsvár was revived as its official name. From 1945 to 1974 it was changed back to Cluj. In 1974, in accordance with the policy of assessing new nationalist symbolism by the Ceaușescu regime, the name Napoca was added to Cluj, resulting Cluj-Napoca. (Following the Latinist historical discourse of Dacian-Roman-Romanian continuity from 1983, only the Romanian names of localities could be used in print.) Since 1992, Cluj-Napoca has been used as the official name of the city.

⁹ Barker, “Learning Memory and Remembering History,” 152.

As Daniela Koleva points out, life stories are retrospective accounts: the present situation defines what is important and what can be left out, just as the present position of the interviewee defines the message or plot of the story.¹⁰ The reconstruction of the past in life stories is based on human memory, that is, a creative process which is guided more by attitudes and values (including their comments, explanations, evaluations, and contextualization) than by the storage of facts. The oral account of life stories forms a bridge between private and public spheres by making one's experience known to others who are physically present, where the interviewee is attentive to the interviewer's reactions. These accounts are, in a way, co-authored dialogues rather than monologues. They are also acts of self-preservation with which the interviewee aims to construct a vindicated identity. Memories are not static but rather dynamic and therefore change over time. The form and content of a memory depends partly on when the memory is recalled. After certain time has elapsed since the encoding of the target memory, archival memories are formed, which are considered to be so permanent and resistant to change that no written records or other forms of evidence are able to "correct" the "non-veridical" target memory.¹¹ For this reason, historical evidence contained in documents or statistics has no effect on archival memories.

The sample consisted of members of the local community and, since our focus was on ethnically biased memories of communism in urban areas, all interviews were with Hungarians born in Cluj. We focused on life-story interviews made with people from different generations (born either in the interwar years or the first postwar years), different genders, and who belonged to either the "traditional workers' group" or to the "new workers' group." The latter group already belonged to the network of new educational institutions that were built in the postwar decades by the new regime, under which institutionalized professional training was a prerequisite for entering the "field of work." The interviews were conducted mainly with people from the city's industrial area whose memories might reflect the transformations of the decades after 1945. The Clujana Plants¹ and the 16 February Railway Plants were the largest industrial plants in the first decade of the communist regime. They have had the longest tradition in the industrial area of Cluj, retaining their symbolic significance even when new, even larger, heavy industry factories were built in their wake (Unirea, Metalul Roșu). These factories underwent every stage of modernization and

¹⁰ Daniela Koleva, "'My Life Has Mostly Been Spent Working': Notions and Patterns of Work in Socialist Bulgaria," *Anthropological Notebooks* (Slovene Anthropological Society) 14, no. 1 (2008): 27–48, http://www.drustvo-antropologov.si/AN/PDF/2008_1/Anthropological_Notebooks_XIV_1_Koleva.pdf. This article also contains a case study of a life story interview with a retired miner born in 1940.

¹¹ Barker, "Learning Memory and Remembering History," 153.

investment made between 1960 and 1990.¹² The interviewees reflect on the transformations associated with communism, including professional and public life, the architectural landscape, or their own private lives, from the first post-war years to the late 1980s.

Work played a central role in the communist regime's official ideological imaginary and its plans to create a new symbolic hierarchy and a so-called "normal biography."¹³ As the sole proprietor and employer, the socialist state exercised direct influence over the lives of its citizens. It also set the standard for the concept of "normality" and of a "normal biography." Work was therefore central to the identity of all individuals, and the basis of the entire social order. It was also vital for the achievement of biographical stability and the structuring and coherence of life narratives. The communist takeovers, both in Bulgaria and Romania, were presented in terms of "the working class coming to power." The political terror institutionalized in the 1950s was often represented as the effect of "class struggle," which officially aimed to reinforce the "power of workers and peasants" against the "enemies," who were generically called "reactionaries." As communist ideology understood the nature of work essentially as the production of material items, where industrialization was one of the main priorities of the new regime, industrial work took priority in the hierarchy elaborated by the communist regime's representatives. Industrial workers were constantly recruited for positions that were considered to be prestigious. In the early period of the new regime such workers enjoyed a higher rank in the symbolic hierarchy than agricultural or vocational workers, as they did in Romania, Bulgaria, or Hungary.¹⁴

But the everyday perceptions failed to match the representations of the "workers in power" in communist propaganda. From the late 1950s and early 1960s memories of the workers interviewed for this study testify to a certain *frustration*, for they perceived a sustained depreciation of their former positions. The memory of this transformation is generally linked with the appearance of new technological knowledge and of new personnel, who are often remembered as "those from the benches of schools," somewhat like the pejorative term "clerks" used by the miner in Daniela Koleva's study.¹⁵ In the 1970s the sym-

¹² Ștefan Pascu et al., eds., *Istoria Clujului* (Cluj, 1974): 514; Egyed Ákos, "Mișcarea muncitorească din Transilvania în anii 1880–1890," *Studii* 10, no. 4 (1957): 52; István Lakatos, *Emlékeim. Szemben az árral* (Marosvásárhely, 2005), vol. 1, 188–234, 377–78.

¹³ Koleva, "My Life Has Mostly Been Spent Working," 28.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 30–31. The "sacralization," via ideology, of certain occupations such as those of construction workers, metallurgists, and above all miners, is described by Gheorghe Dimitrov, who claims that, "The miners are the backbone of the working class." See also Călin Morar-Vulcu, *Republica își făurește oamenii. Construcția identităților politice în discursul oficial în România, 1948–1965* (Cluj-Napoca: Editura Eikon, 2007), 239–301.

¹⁵ Koleva, "My Life Has Mostly Been Spent Working," 35.

bolic value of occupations shifted toward professions that were more closely associated with learning and scientific and technological progress. These statements led us to analyze the possible interconnections between generational aspects and the technological context of the conflict within the workers' community, as recalled in the interviews. The memory of the gradual loss of status among "traditional workers" after 1956 was also often remembered in terms of an ethnic distinction made by the communist regime, which was a dominant motif in Hungarian historiography.¹⁶

In order to understand the discourse of members of different groups involved in the processes of recollecting successive stages of "existing socialism," we found it useful to distinguish between the notions of "traditional work" and the modern "work ethic." "Traditional work" is associated with physical effort, hard work, and the balance between the amount of work and well-being. Skills were acquired by gaining first-hand experience as an apprentice ("skill of the hands"), not by pursuing formal education. Knowledge was valued as something that may be applied to the solution of practical tasks, and workers were perceived in terms of continuous generations in which changes do happen, but are not supposed to affect traditional values inherited from previous generations. Work is therefore defined as manual work in contrast to intellectual work, which is considered to be spurious. At the same time, we acknowledge that the nature and conditions of hard manual work, in contrast to vocational and intellectual work, often caused a sense of dissatisfaction.¹⁷

The notion of a modern "work ethic" is associated with dedication and with the acquisition of specialized, formal knowledge in professional institutional settings. It is organized institutionally, regulated by formal norms, and implies the division of skills and tasks, as well as institutional hierarchies. The work

¹⁶ The post-1989 historiography of the communist regime written by Hungarian historians from Romania, and by scholars from Hungary who were interested in the history of communist Romania, generally evaluates the Romanian communist experience after 1956–1958 as one of increasing nationalistic and autarchic tendencies, whereby the Hungarian minority is presented as a victim of discriminatory policies and assimilatory drive of the Romanian communist nomenclature. Over the last two decades, this narrative has dominated Hungarian media from Romania. See Gábor Vincze, *Illúziók és csalódások. Fejezetek a romániai magyarság második világháború utáni történetéből* (Csíkszereda: Státus Könyvkiadó, 1999); Mihály Zoltán Nagy and Ágoston Olti, eds., *Érdekképviselet vagy pártpolitika? Iratok a Magyar Népi Szövetség történetéhez 1944–1953* (Csíkszereda: Pro Print, 2009); Gábor Vincze, ed., *Történeti kényszerpályák—Kisebbségi realpolitikák II.: Dokumentumok a romániai magyar kisebbség történetének tanulmányozásához 1944–1989* (Csíkszereda: Pro Print, 2003); Sándor Pál-Antal, *Áldozatok–1956. A forradalmat követő megtorlások a Magyar Autonóm Tartományban* (Marosvásárhely: Mentor Kiadó, 2006).

¹⁷ Koleva, "My Life Has Mostly Been Spent Working," 41–43. Daniela Koleva also quotes the saying, "Study to avoid working [i.e., manual working]," which pervades the Hungarian or Romanian oral traditions.

ethic is therefore associated with the purpose of life in general and a common “calling,” rather than with simply earning a living and belonging to a professional community. It implies responsibility, creativity, and self-fulfillment.¹⁸

These two notions of work largely coexisted, but also reflected changing patterns and perceptions of work. Work still provided the stability and security essential to personal and social continuity. In the final decades of the communist regime, the gap between the “ideology of work” and the practicalities of everyday work continually increased.¹⁹

The interviews also revealed a wide variety of distinctions between “us” and “them,” between workers and “bosses” (“the educated,” or “office workers”), which were defined as two sides of a conflict.²⁰ The “engineers” were generally included in the category “us,” because they testified to the fruitlessness of the whole endeavor (and sometimes, in case of the miners, also shared the hardships of workers’ lives), and also condemned the wastage of resources within socialist industry. These distinctions also help us to evaluate the ways in which narratives of identity emerge out of the life stories that focus on interpretations of the transformations experienced from the mid-1950s to the late 1980s.

The first of the interviewees selected for the present study (known as B. G.) was born in 1929 in Cluj.²¹ He was raised in the interwar period in a workers’ family of Hungarian ethnic origin living in Romania, where his father worked as a mason in the local industry. Since his mother died at an early age, the three children were raised by B. G.’s father and a stepmother. They initially lived in a bourgeois neighborhood outside the traditional workers’ quarter in an apartment with one room and a kitchen. During the Second World War, they moved to the traditional workers’ quarters. The house was hit during a bombing raid, though B. G.’s family had resettled in a neighboring village for the duration of the war. Subsequently, they returned to Cluj to live in the house that had been hit by a bomb, and B. G.’s father found a job in reconstruction at the Dermata (later called Clujana) Plants. He obtained this employment with the help of “family connections,” for his grandmother’s influential second husband had been held in a Soviet prisoner camp during the First World War and became a communist, working at the bureau of supplies at the Dermata Plants.

B. G. attended a Romanian elementary school and experienced firsthand the changes brought about by the wartime Hungarian administration when he had to switch to a Hungarian Pedagogical School, where he remained for almost two

¹⁸ Ibid., 44–45.

¹⁹ Ibid., 33–34.

²⁰ Stating—as the workers recalled in their oral memories—that their “hard work” did not make any sense because of the latter’s “incompetence” (ibid., 39).

²¹ Interview no. 1 with B. G., b. 1929, Cluj. Interview taken by Tamás Lönhárt in Cluj, on 23 May 2007. The original record and the transcript of all the interviews are in the possession of Tamás Lönhárt. The interviews were conducted in Hungarian.

years. He ultimately attended the Piarist Gymnasium as a practicing Catholic, where he encountered the effects of the postwar educational reform, introduced in 1948 by the new communist regime. In those early days, which were marked by a special transitory administration under Soviet military rule in 1944 and 1945, then by the rise of the communists to power, the Hungarian People's Union was a political ally of the radical left. Education in the Hungarian language was the standard in most educational institutions in Cluj. Romanian administrative bodies entered the city only in the summer of 1945, in the midst of a long dispute over the future of northern Transylvania, which lasted more than a year.²² In this context, the local trade unions' official language in the industrial zone was still Hungarian, and remained so for over a decade after 1945. The city was remembered as one whose population was still dominated by ethnic Hungarians.

The second interviewee (called L. G.) was born in 1945 in the same city.²³ His father, who had been raised in the Hóstát,²⁴ served as a gendarme, then as a member of the secret police under the Hungarian administration, and had to flee shortly after the end of the war. Initially they lived in the traditional workers' quarters, then moved closer to the center of the old city in the vicinity of the police headquarters. His mother worked at the pharmaceutical factory in Cluj, where she had remained with her children. The father visited them only once in the 1970s as he was still blacklisted and afraid of being arrested. The interviewee and his brother were effectively raised by their mother, who received help from the trade union to do this. The lack of basic necessities was a common issue at that time, but is recalled in connection with a certain sense of solidarity.²⁵

We had only 370 grams of bread, and for the hard laborers there was half a kilo... There was a ticket system. Bread, sugar, oil, clothes ... If you wanted clothes with a ticket, and knowing that one does not get enough tickets to buy trousers, one borrowed tickets from other people. At one time you would give them to me, then I would give them to you ... Even shoes had to be bought like that ... And still you had to pay for these things. And the money we earned

²² Mihály Zoltán Nagy and Gábor Vincze, eds., *Autonómisták és centralisták. Észak-Erdély a két román bevonulás között (1944. szeptember–1945. március)* (Kolozsvár/Csíksereda: Erdélyi Múzeum Egyesület and Pro Print, 2004); Mihály Fülöp and Gábor Vincze, eds., *Revízió vagy autonómia? Iratok a magyar–román kapcsolatok történetéről (1945–1947)* (Budapest: Teleki László Alapítvány, 1998).

²³ Interview with L. G., b. 194, Cluj. Oral history interview given to Lönhárt Tamás, recorded in Cluj on 21 May 2007.

²⁴ Hóstát = Hoffstadt, in the east of the city, inhabited by families of workers who kept vegetable gardens around their houses to provide a second source of income. This community was one of the traditional suppliers of the city's markets. This particular neighborhood was also demolished toward the end of the communist era and blocks of flats were built there instead (L. T.).

²⁵ Interview with L. G., b. 1945, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 21 May 2007.

was so little that a family could not afford to dress properly ... And every family was missing somebody, a relative. After the war. Most of my acquaintances were like that. Or someone had not come back from war, or died of a disease, everybody was struggling.²⁶

L. G. started school in the late 1940s. He remembered that “we spent a lot of the time thinking about eating, our minds were focused on how to get something to eat, and little on the lessons.”²⁷ He recalls that pupils attending his school, which was situated close to the industrial zone, were all Hungarian. In 1957 he was taken on as an apprentice to blacksmith, and later he worked in the metal processing industry at the Armatura Plant, which was held in high esteem among workers. In the meantime he started playing soccer on the Terapia Chemical Factory team, where his mother worked. In 1961 he was drafted in the army, and after demobilization he worked at the 16 February Railway Plant, one of the most important plants of the city at that time.

The interviews with L. S. M., who was born in 1946 in Cluj, provide a different viewpoint.²⁸ After the war, she lived in the central part of the old city in a rented house. When her father returned from an American prisoner of war camp in Austria, and as a result of what he called “the new authorities’ will,” he was initially detained for questioning by the local Soviet authorities, and later prevented from working because he was considered to be an “untrustworthy element.” They had to move out of their apartment to the traditional workers’ area in Iris, where her grandparents lived. From that moment, three generations, including the families of the two brothers, lived in the same limited space, together with another family that had been moved there by the authorities from the rural area. Her father had learned shoemaking from young apprentices at the Dermata Plant before the war while preparing to enter the academy of arts. But after the war he made shoes at home with the help of his relatives from the Dermata Plant, and sold them in the rural areas near the city in order to raise money for food. As his daughter remembered, he could have been jailed for this unlawful occupation “but what else could he do, if he was not given employment at a plant and there was not enough income to feed the family, even though mother was working at the Dermata Plant. He must have felt miserable. And that lasted for almost five years.”²⁹

L. S. M.’s mother worked at the accounting offices of the Dermata (Herbák János/Clujana) Plants before the war. After 1944, when her husband was forced to join the Hungarian army, she stayed behind to look after her family. After 1946, when her husband returned and after their second child was born, she was

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Interview with L. S. M., b. 1946, Cluj. Interview carried out by Lönhárt Tamás in Cluj on 13 May 2008.

²⁹ Ibid.

the main breadwinner for the entire family. They experienced hard times in the early 1950s. L. S. M. attended school in the traditional workers' neighborhood. Then she attended the technical school of the Herbák János Plants, with the prospect of being taken on at the factory as generations of her family had been before. She graduated from the professional school for leather-processing industry and shoemaking in the early 1960s. She recalls that Hungarian had been replaced as the language of study at that time, so her studies took place in Romanian "But we were happy. Some of my colleagues from the Iris quarter were there, so we went together."³⁰

In the meantime, in the mid-1950s her father had also been given a job there. At first he worked at the Iris ceramics factory drawing models. Later on he got a job at the CFR (Romanian Railways Company), then at the Technofrig Plants. On top of that, as a result of the difficult situation, he also had a job checking norms in the Recolta Agricultural Cooperative. Even after the ban on working in production was lifted, it was difficult for him to find a proper job to sustain his family.

While studying at the technical school, L. S. M. also became acquainted with her future workplace at the Dermata and Herbák János Plants, where she attended lessons and gained practical experience, each over a period of three days. In 1964 she was taken on at the Clujana (the former Dermata and Herbák János) Plants, where she worked until 1998, when she had to leave on account of severe health problems at the time when the plants began to struggle for their existence in the "transition period." She got married in the early 1970s and had two children. Her husband died early, only two years after her father's death, which meant that she had to support her extended family alone. They moved to a less spacious apartment, and succeeded in raising the children until they too could earn their living. Both of her children found work in the education system. She always wanted to be a teacher, and was attracted to the natural sciences, but her family did not lend her any support: "I had to work to earn a living. That is how it was in those days, when parents often took pragmatic decisions which were decisive for their children's future."³¹

For this present inquiry, we chose to include the interviews conducted with Sz. I., who was born in 1947.³² She was a first child, followed two years later by a second girl. Her parents were first generation settlers in Cluj. Her mother ran the household, while her father worked as a mason. Before the Second Vienna Award in 1940, he worked in Bucharest. Then they moved to Cluj in northern Transylvania, which became part of Hungary during the war. The family lived a

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Interview no. 1 with Sz. I., b. 1947, Cluj; interview no. 2 with Sz. I., b. 1947 in Cluj. Both interviews conducted by Lönhárt Tamás, on 12 April 2008 and 22 April 2008, respectively.

steady, secure life there, even after the war: "My father earned well, first as a mason, then as a foreman at the construction plants, working all over the region, wherever were major construction sites. I do not recall that we suffered under the shortages at that time [in the 1950s]. We were workers."³³

At the time of Sz. I.'s birth, the family lived in the Donáth (which is now called the Grigorescu) quarter in a rented house with a garden in Garibaldi Street. In the early 1950s they moved to the city center and lived for a number of years in a rented apartment in Grozăvescu Street in a neighborhood known for its villas, before moving back to Donáth again.

Once I got lost while with my mother near the central marketplace, but people on the streets helped me find my way home. In the meantime she ran all over the place carrying my little sister, and even went to the police. In the end she found me at home. Things were really different then, it was safe, and people helped each other, there was a certain degree of solidarity and respect. Today you can't leave your child alone in front of the apartment building.³⁴

She started school in the local neighborhood in 1954 and learned in Hungarian. Later, in 1961, she graduated from seventh grade and became a member of the Communist Youth Union (UTC).³⁵ Her father, a member of the Communist Party, died in the same year. She attended a Hungarian-language secondary school until 1965. She recollected that parallel classes were run in Romanian and Hungarian in the same school, where the school master was Romanian, and his deputy Hungarian. She associated this memory with the massive influx of Romanians from the neighboring villages to Cluj.³⁶

Since technical studies were obligatory, they were taken to the factory to attend practical classes. Later on she began to work at the technical school of the Clujana Plants, where she remained for almost four decades. During her tenure there she noticed that changes were beginning to take place. According to her subsequent recollections, more and more young people from villages in other parts of Transylvania or even Moldova attended the technical school, aiming to find work in the industrial sector. She also associated this memory with the new blocks of flats that were increasingly being built in the second half of the 1960s. The industrial zone underwent a major transformation at that time:

It was at that time, in 1964 and 1965, that we had just begun work in the Clujana [Plant], where some of the old buildings were demolished, and huge new buildings were beginning to be erected, a lot of which were completed during those years when I started working there. Also at that time, the other factories were enlarged.³⁷

³³ Interview no. 1 with Sz. I., b. 1947, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 12 April 2008.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Uniunea Tineretului Comunist = the Communist Youth Union.

³⁶ Interview no. 1 with Sz. I., b. 1947, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 12 April 2008.

³⁷ Ibid.

These changes also brought about considerable changes for the workers from the industrial zone. When recalling the workers' "world" at the end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s, some interviewees expressed their appreciation of the sense of security that having a job brought them, even though they were not paid very well: "Things were considerably easier, and much more secure at that time, because young people had a job to earn their living. You did not have to beg for it, you were given work. If someone did not want to go to work they were taken away."³⁸

L. S. M. remembered³⁹ that, in the early 1960s, when they started the professional school or Dermata, the factory signed a contract with their parents, which stated that, after finishing their studies, students had to work in that industrial plant for at least ten years. If they did not do so, the parents would have to pay back the tuition fee. As a result, as L. S. M. recalled, they were "tied to the factory," and none of his acquaintances ever thought of trying to leave. In fact, most of them enjoyed work and were motivated by its material benefits and the opportunity to gain independence from their parents.

L. S. M. also remembered that workers in the Clujana Plants, who were initially rude to them, gradually became more helpful. When she began having health problems as a result of chemicals used in leather processing, her immediate colleagues at the production plant were understanding. And when her mother requested that the production line foreman transfer her to the "paper works," this request was indeed granted. She was given a new job as a secretary, and later she moved to the financial planning office, after graduating from secondary school (*lyceum*) and attending professional courses. As she moved from one work place to another, her relationship with other workers changed: "We were then seen as clerks working with papers, not as real workers. On the production lines of the plant people did not give much recognition to that kind of work. For them real work was done by hand, not with paper, and required effort."⁴⁰

A further dimension of working life was revealed in the interviews conducted with B. G., who "entered production" first as a traditional worker on a construction site, and later gained qualifications and became an economist in several industrial plants, before becoming an engineer at the Clujana Plants in the late 1960s.⁴¹ He recalled that, in spite of technological changes, large numbers of traditional workers still worked on the production line alongside many unqualified workers, for the industrial sector had experienced both a qualitative and quantitative boom in the late 1960s and early 1970s. At the end of the

³⁸ Interview with L. G., b. 1945, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 21 May 2007.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Interview no. 1 with B. G., b. 1929, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 23 May 2007.

1970s, when the economic crisis reached Romania, giving rise to a dramatic shortage of resources for over a decade, industrial zones continued to take on growing numbers of workers. In the interviews with L. S. M.,⁴² the period from 1979 to 1989 saw ever larger numbers of new recruits from the surrounding rural areas in spite of the reduction of investment in technology and the shortage of resources:

It was somehow irrational. The only logic behind it could be from, you know, those times when nobody could be unemployed. Everybody was recruited as a worker, somewhere, even if they did not really work, but just came in "to the workplace." This is how it was ... and it was that systematic. They said that they would bring cities and villages on to the same level ... well [at this point L. S. M. smiles ironically—N/A] after a while we had the village in the city, and they provided them with facilities, apartments and so on ... lots of resources, without any impact on production.⁴³

The rationality underlying the recruitment of workers and the planning of production in the final decades of the communist regime was another topic, as L. G. pointed out:

If something had to be done and one man did not succeed in solving it, then two people were put to work on it. If two were not enough [to solve it], then they tried three. Under communism it did not matter, everybody needed to earn bread. If he did not know what to do or where he had been sent to work it did not matter.⁴⁴

In the early 1950s, after industrial plants in Romania had been nationalized, worker-directors (or managers) were nominated to lead these plants, in the fervor of the "class struggle." In response to our questions about the relations between workers, directors, and engineers, we captured some stories about the privileged positions of traditional workers in the 1950s, which gradually declined in the 1960s. Surprisingly, without prompting from the questioner, they talked about changes brought about by new technological investments and the appearance of new trained and qualified workers in the factories. In their recollections this influx took place in the late 1960s. However, we noted that this event in fact took place well before the date they ascribed to this event in their recollections, for the influx of new trained workers was documented from the second half of the 1950s, and technological investment had already begun under government led by Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej in the early 1960s. L. G., moreover, told us how a worker-manager was removed from his job in the early 1960s. It is well known that the period marked by worker-managers ended in

⁴² Interview with L. S. M., b. 1946, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 13 May 2008.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Interview with L. G., b. 1945, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 21 May 2007.

the mid-1950s, and all of them had been removed by the second half of the 1950s.⁴⁵

Another remarkable feature of the interviews is that interviewees systematically referred to the ethnic identity of worker-managers, as in the statement by L. G.:

The manager was also Hungarian, in the beginning all were Hungarians. ... He worked at the railway plants first, as was I when recruited to work there. He did such minor jobs to start with. It was messy, though he was used to this. But the workers [he refers to the worker-managers-N/A] were finally removed because they did not have any proper schooling. He had only done seven years at school and then became a manager ... then he was out, taken out and sent back to the production line in the 1960s.⁴⁶

When talking about the transformations in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the interviewees also referred to the changing language used in official meetings at work, and suggested that new things had to be taken into account when someone was promoted to a leading position, both in the industrial management and in the party apparatus. The following statement about the 1960s makes this clear:

At the meetings, if there was a Romanian everything had to be discussed in Romanian. Before that they conducted every meeting in Hungarian. ... At that time there were some people who did not understand, but they were communists and somebody explained the main ideas to them in their own language... But now the party secretary could not be anything other than a Romanian. They told outsiders that they did not throw them out, but just replaced them. Everywhere, and even managers ... the good old director became the director's deputy.⁴⁷

L. S. M. remembered that a generational change took place in the late 1970s. Older workers were gradually removed from the production lines. The same thing happened in the planning office and in management.

At that time I was in the finance office of the Clujana [Plants]. And when I was recruited a lot of the people in the office were of Hungarian origin. People who reached retirement age were replaced with Romanians, so that the leadership consisted entirely of Romanians then.⁴⁸

Once more, the transformations generated by technological changes and generational issues were associated (in the recollections of Hungarian workers) with the effects of the nationalist upheavals of the Romanian communist regime in the late 1970s, which peaked in the 1980s.

That is the time when the *centrul de calcul* [computing center] appeared. Planning, lists of materials on order, and salaries the whole plant were to be calculated on those new computers. Some were later linked with the factories or the center. But it was huge ... And to do

⁴⁵ See Lönhárt and Țărău, "Remembering the Old City, Building a New One," 12.

⁴⁶ Interview with L. G., b. 1945 in Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 21 May 2007.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Interview with L. S. M., b. 1946, Cluj. Recorded in Cluj on 13 May 2008.

this new people had come. ... We could socialize with some of them, but problems began to arise, as they intervened from above, and Hungarians were not promoted anymore, which affected even our relations, it then felt weird with the nationalist issue arising as well.⁴⁹

We can conclude from these recollections that the conflict situation between traditional workers and the new realities was compounded by ethnicity. Several levels of “perceived” realities seemed to come together in one statement explaining how and why things happened and how different interpretations by workers of Hungarian origin were dominated by national issues.

The conflicting inner group identities underpinning distinctions between “us” and “them” were founded on traditional notions of work and the new work “ethic,” as Daniela Koleva stated in her study of the Bulgarian case. When L. S. M. became involved in production, she was perceived to have betrayed her solidarity with the group she once belonged to.

L. S. M.’s reflections about the changes of workers’ attitudes toward work ethics and discipline provide insight into the later decades under the communist regime.

But even they [the hard manual workers] began to look for ways of not working too hard, for they thought it was no longer worth it anymore. No matter how much you worked, you got the same miserable salary. So they thought, why push, they really don’t pay us to die here.⁵⁰

The direct link between work and welfare gradually disappeared. L. S. M. compared the values ascribed to traditional work, which was marked by constant conflict between the traditional workers, who were increasingly gradually marginalized, and “bosses,” who presided over a system in crisis. She also reflected on the motives of duplicity and double-standards of those “who run the system” on the factory level:

Thieving also became an issue. They had to put several filters at the entrances. Everybody took something, a hammer, shoelaces, parts of a shoe, pieces of leather. They said: well, the bosses also leave with several pairs of shoes and much more. They knew that if someone from the local or higher establishment wanted a good pair of shoes, they came to the managers’ office, and the shoes were taken directly from the office. They picked what they liked most, while being served with coffee, then left while the doormen saluted and smiled at them. After that the manager talked about the socialist duty to increase production levels and help punish those who steal. So how can you talk about what they did?⁵¹

L. S. M.’s recollections made a connection between the gradually acknowledged futility of their effort to sustain the goals of a production unit in the late

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Ibid.

1970s and 1980s during the crisis of the socialist system, coupled with the frustration felt by engineers, economists, technicians, and the general demise of work ethics:

We struggled with the lack of resources and materials used in production, and began to stay at work without really working there. And we played cards or drank. Order and discipline was gone. There were things that could not even be imagined before; old workers like my grandfather had not even dreamt in their nightmares of how it became later. In those early times they organized themselves, maintained order, disciplined everyone, and there was a worker's etiquette, a kind of pride before. They were the workers' aristocrats, who began to die out at that time. The same could not be said of the new workers—they attended their workplace more than they actually worked.⁵²

L. S. M.'s interpretation of the "new habits" developed by workers in response to the general crisis is clearly very critical and moralizing. She also questioned the quality of workers in comparison to the image of traditional workers acquired from her elder family members' stories. She then concluded that workers' status as new settlers in an urban landscape declined:

Most of them came after the 1960s, mostly in the 1970s and 1980s—and were taken on buses from their village every morning, first to the Clujana [Plants] and then to other factories. Then they settled in the new quarters built for them. But they still went back to the village for supplies on weekends and remained more attached to those places than did real city inhabitants [*városiak*]. The old workers had been raised in the vicinity of factories in the old neighborhood and worked for generations there. They were part of the city. But these new ones only worked in a factory after being put there by the leaders at that time, so they remained villagers [*falusiak*], unlike the city dwellers.⁵³

These interviews provide invaluable insight into the housing situation; the transformation of everyday life and of health care and family planning; the participation in mass gatherings; as well as travel abroad within the eastern bloc.⁵⁴ All of these recollections allow the following conclusions to be drawn:

A. Major changes brought about by new technological investment and the massive influx of professionally educated new workers did not eliminate traditional workers, but gradually dislocated them, for their numbers remained high and they retained a certain symbolical capital at the beginning of the 1960s. However, in the second half of the 1960s (following the technological upgrade campaign), industry and production were officially presented as having derived

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ These subjects were partially reflected in a more extensive working paper, presented by the authors at the annual conference of the "Remembering Communism" project in Bucharest (1–5 October 2009).

from science and research, rather than exclusively, or even primarily, from hard labor. This change coincided with the launching of a new official discourse, which incorporated some elements of ethnic nationalism. The symbolical capital of traditional workers (dominated by ethnic Hungarians in Cluj) gradually declined. These transformations, involving technological upgrading and the turn toward nationalism in official propaganda, were conceived of in people's memories as interdependent, for they both eroded the status of the interviewed workers. Their gradual marginalization as professionally sub qualified people, or the discrimination against their ethnic origin, became one conglomeration of frustrations in their memories.

B. Both traditional and new workers associated the beginnings of decline with the "first" signs of "a new reality" at the end of the 1960s. This, in turn, was associated with a new set of symbols used in public spaces and the gradual disappearance of the Hungarian language in public.

C. The recollections of Hungarian workers establish a strong link between the increase in population, the arrival of a new group of settlers and social distinctions ("these were not *real* workers anymore"), as well as the diminishing status of the Hungarian community and the decline of work ethic. The new apartment buildings built on the periphery of the city are associated with "them" (with the new, mainly Romanian community), while the traditional central area is conceived of as a place for "us," the traditional, mainly Hungarian community which was perceived to have been in constant decay from the late 1960s. These elements lead us to conclude that this specific way of recalling the past and building a mental map of the two communities located in the same city reflects less the social and ethnic transformation as it happened, than the mental associations of the new symbolism of public places in the traditional center with the decreasing status of the Hungarian community.

D. In the narratives of the Hungarian workers we interviewed, the end of the 1970s and the 1980s were recalled as the most dramatic phase of a general crisis. This phase was characterized by a lack of resources, the end of investment in technology, and increasing frustration with unprofessional management and with the dramatic increase of official nationalist propaganda during the last decades of communism in Romania.

16. Workers in the Workers' State: Industrialization, Labor, and Everyday Life in the Industrial City of Rovinari

*Corina Cimpoieru*¹

In Search of the Lost Proletariat

The proletariat never existed. It was artificially made by the communists and it disappeared once the communists were gone.

Cristian Pârvulescu



Figure 16.1. A front-ranking group of workers from the quarry of Rovinari.

¹ Beneficiary of the project “Doctoral Scholarships Supporting Research: Competitiveness, Quality, and Cooperation in the European Higher Education Area” co-funded by the European Union through the European Social Fund, Sectorial Operational Programme Human Resources Development, 2007–2013.

Following the above motto and photograph, the present study starts from an apparent paradox dealing with a subject that undergoes a dichotomic representation. While the motto contests a proletariat in re, the photograph affirms it blatantly through corpor(e)ality. The aim of presenting this paradox is to draw attention to the condition of industrial workers in socialism and its representation after the fall of the regime. The motto is frequently encountered in the post-socialist hegemonic discourse which reduces the proletariat to a sort of an ideological symbol of communism, with a fixed and anonymous identity, but deprived of substance. The photograph presents a visual narrative of real workers but likewise endows them with a monolithic identity, defined this time by the former official discourse of the regime. In both cases we deal with politically constructed conceptualizations. The present research aims at describing the socialist condition of the *really existing proletariat* as can be inferred from the narrative accounts of those whose lives were and still are fundamentally marked by industrial work. The syntagm *really existing proletariat* is not coined in opposition to the official political conceptualization of the industrial proletariat, neither does it aim at creating a new taxonomy or displacing already existing theories. Rather, it draws attention to alternative ways of reading the “lived” world of workers in socialism through an ethnographic approach, by providing a theoretical and methodological instrument that will resonate with the social reality in socialism.

Rovinari: The Biography of a Really Existent Proletariat

Based on historical and anthropological research on the formation of the communist working class in Romania, the case study of the new town of Rovinari presents in miniature the socialist industrialization and urbanization processes that the country underwent during Ceaușescu’s regime. In its relatively short history Rovinari appears as a town “made” by Ceaușescu at the beginning of the 1980s as a result of his national policies for energy independence through the intensive exploitation of the coalfield resources in the region.

Established in order to serve the administrative needs of the coalfield exploitation sites nearby, the new town of Rovinari can also be considered a “social experiment” through which the mobilized workforce drawn mostly from the peasantry—coming from different regions of the country and with diverse levels of experience—had to be integrated into the rhythms and practices of industrial labor and urban space. What interested me in particular were the experiences and perceptions of those whose lives were fundamentally changed by the industrial labor conditions and the urban life provided by the “city without archives.” People from all over the country (especially from the north of Romania) came here to become miners, either sent over by force or by their free will.

They were first-generation workers—most of them lacking a working-class mentality—settling in a town that went through a spontaneous urbanization.

In terms of methodology the present study is based on fieldwork research carried out in the town of Rovinari in 2006 and 2007. Taking as a point of reference an earlier survey conducted there by Vintilă Mihăilescu at the beginning of the 1980s,² it is designed as a flashback into Rovinari's recent past aiming to reconstruct its history after twenty-five years. Particular emphasis is placed on the reflexive function of memory in relation to the present: the traces of the past are never fixed; they are continuously being resignified and symbolically reinvented in accordance with the problems and necessities of the present. Rovinari experienced a harsh transformation after 1990 that made the memory of communism a reference memory and a framework for the evaluation of the past in comparison with the present. Thus, this study focuses on the memory of industrial labor and everyday life during communism as it appeared in the narrative stories of those who came to Rovinari at the beginning of the 1980s. The main research questions were related to their settlement in the industrial city both as urban dwellers and industrial workers. Thirty oral history interviews were carried out with people that had lived or worked in the city during the communist period. Miners were considered the vanguard of the working class and were invested with high ideological and socioeconomic capital. They became the core of the communist propaganda, which stressed their fundamental role in the construction of the new socialist society.

Bringing together two types of discourse—of private memory and of the official press—the study presents the process of working-class formation in a specific local context. Three different strategies are examined regarding the construction of the communist working class for the mining exploitation of Rovinari: the use of youth labor on building sites as a form of socialist control and (re)education; the economic policies of relocation of workers within the industrial sector which resulted in the so-called actions of mutual work assistance (*întrajutorare muncitorească*); finally, the proletarianization of the peasantry, a process that involved both the transformation of space with the large-scale demolition of villages, as well as the makeover of a social category, the peasants who became wage-workers in the industrial sector.

² Vintilă Mihăilescu, ed., *Rovinari '82* (București: Institutul Victor Babeș, Laboratorul de Antropologie, 1982).

Conceptual and Historical Framework

Socialist Industrialization: Between Growth and Decay

Plans for socialist industrialization began immediately after the Romanian communists seized power, at first assisted by Soviet aid.³ The implementation of the Soviet model of industrialization came at a time of deep political and economic changes in Romania. Starting from a very low prewar base, industrialization proceeded rapidly but unevenly throughout the postwar period. While acknowledging the high output levels in the industrial sector, Michael Montias draws attention to the unbalanced growth⁴ of industrialization that was achieved mainly through coercive measures, intensive exploitation of resources, and high rates of accumulation that were reinvested in priority sectors of the economy.

Ceaușescu's coming to power in 1965 ushered in a national trend that culminated in 1969 with the announcement of the plan to build a "multilaterally developed socialist society."⁵ The regime pursued centralized control of the economy "aimed at transforming Romania into an industrialized self-sufficient fortress."⁶ Excessive accumulation of resources in fixed assets was a means through which the socialist bureaucracy maximized its allocative power,⁷ especially for the privileged sectors of the heavy industry such as machine building, metallurgy, and the power and fuel industry at the expense of the other branches of the economy.⁸ János Kornai draws attention to the shortage economy created

³ The Soviet contribution to the postwar Romanian industrialization not only proved to be minimal, but also had disastrous effects on the country's exploitation of resources and raw materials. For instance, the so-called SOVROMS—joint Soviet–Romanian companies established immediately after the armistice agreements that were supposed to give the impression that Romania was on the "golden path" of Stalinist industrialization—plundered the national economy. The "negative phase" of industrialization continued in 1948 with the nationalization of the main industrial enterprises (Malaxa, IAR, SET).

⁴ John Michael Montias, "Unbalanced Growth," *The American Economic Review* 53, no. 2 (1963): 562–71.

⁵ The concept of the "multilaterally developed socialist society" was launched by Ceaușescu at the Tenth Congress of the RCP (August 1969) in a propaganda document called "Obiectivele de baza si liniile directoare ale dezvoltarii viitoare, economice si socio-culturale, a Romaniei." The next Five-Year Plan (1971–1975) announced "the continuation in a sustained rhythm of the socialist industrialization," "the intensive, multilateral development of agriculture," and high rates of accumulation.

⁶ Avner Ben-Ner and J. Michael Montias, "The Introduction of Markets in a Hypercentralized Economy: The Case of Romania," *The Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5, no. 5 (1991): 164.

⁷ Katherine Verdery, "Theorizing Socialism: A Prologue to the 'Transition,'" *American Ethnologist* 18, no. 1 (1991): 419–34, 437–39.

⁸ Centralized and discretionary allocations to the heavy industry not only disadvantaged the agricultural and the service sectors, but also blocked the development of leading branches of the economy—i.e., telecommunications, cybernetics, informatics or scientific and technological research that were otherwise praised in the ideological documents of the party.

by the continuous hoarding of means of production to the detriment of producing consumer goods.⁹ He defines the socialist system as a resource-constrained system in which scarce supply froze in place anything that was hoardable—i.e., resources that produced other resources—and generated an insatiable hunger for investment and bargaining over resources. Enterprises operated within “soft budget constraints,” i.e., they couldn’t go bankrupt even if they were loss-making, because they were incessantly subsidized by the state. During the 1970s and 1980s the regime continued to force the growth rates of accumulation and investment especially in the energy-intensive heavy industry, which eventually produced dramatic increases in the imports of raw materials and machinery from the West. These were financed with external loans that were paid off in the 1980s with high sacrifices on the part of the population, which was forced to live on shortages. The Romanian economy was on its way to decay, having to pay for its former irrational investment plans.

The New Proletariat and Work Ethic

The postwar plans for the heavy industrialization of the country were the result of a totally new ideological orientation that based its premises on the existence of a proletariat. A new class of workers devoted to the socialist goals of production had to be created out of a precarious workforce drawn mostly from the agricultural sector¹⁰ and poorly qualified for the new industrial targets.

Workers’ faith in socialism was maintained and controlled through socialist labor discipline that stressed hard work as its own reward or purpose. Conscientiousness, rather than material incentive, was at the core of the “proletarian work ethic.”¹¹ The party, seeking to identify itself with the interests of the working class, created a cult of labor.¹² Work, especially physical work, was a key symbol and became the central activity of socialist society. The cult of labor and its subject, the worker, had a special place in the ideological discourse that mythologized the image of the “workers (living) in a workers’ state.” Man had

⁹ János Kornai, “Resource-Constrained versus Demand-Constrained Systems,” *Econometrica* 47, no. 4 (1979): 801–27.

¹⁰ According to an analysis made by the Romanian economist Constantin Ionete regarding the evolution of the Romanian economy in the postwar period, the share of industrial labor had changed considerably between 1950 and 1989, reaching an average of 45% by the 1980s—a percentage that was even higher than the respective share in traditional industrial countries. In addition, the industrial sector increased the labor force irrespective of its low productivity. See Constantin Ionete, *Criza de sistem a economiei de comandă și etapa sa explozivă* (București: Expert, 1993).

¹¹ Timothy Luke, “Proletarian Ethic and Soviet Industrialization,” *The American Political Science Review* 77, no. 3 (1983): 588–601.

¹² David A. Kideckel et al., “A New ‘Cult of Labor’: Stress and Crisis among Romanian Workers,” *Sociologie Românească* 1 (2000): 142–61.

to be socialized through “abnegation in work.” The aim was to create a “work-based status” that would make the worker thankful to the communist regime for providing a self-sufficient proletarian life. Work became almost mandatory since it was “sold” to the one existing “buyer,” the state enterprise.¹³ This monopoly of employment generated what Stephen Crowley has called “mutual dependence” of the worker and the socialist state.¹⁴ In the face of consumer shortages, work became a locus of state control over workers’ life during and outside working hours.

Mobilizing Youth for Work

Youth was assigned a special place under communism. The ideological formation of this social category was mainly the result of the political premises of the modernizing socialist society that emphasized the edifying role of youth, believed to be “the future generation” of communism. Imitating the Soviet Komsomol model,¹⁵ the Romanian communist regime made use of its party-led youth organizations in order to achieve its propagandistic goals. One of the strategies through which the communist regime assumed the role of socializing youth into work was the development of a network of building sites all over the country, the so-called “socialist schools of education through labor.”

The National Youth Working Site of Rovinari (SNTR)

In the 1970s, along with the plan for intensive industrialization of the country, the communists appealed to the “fresh and energetic force” of youth brigade members. National Youth Working Sites with an industrial profile were established all over the country. Successors of the so-called “romantic tradition” (“The Golden Age”) of the Bumbești–Livezeni and Salva–Vișeu building sites

¹³ Trotsky stated that “the principle of the obligation to work has replaced the principle of free employment just as radically as the socialization of the means of production has replaced capitalist property” (see Luke, “Proletarian Ethic,” 596–97). In the last few years of communist Romania it was almost illegal not to work: a special law that punished what was called “parasitism” (i.e., those who did not work) with six months of imprisonment.

¹⁴ Stephen Crowley, “Barriers to Collective Action: Steelworkers and Mutual Dependence in the Former Soviet Union,” *World Politics* 46, no. 4 (1994): 594; “the worker has been dependent on the state enterprise for the distribution of goods and services in short supply, while the enterprise has been dependent on workers in a labor-short economy.... The worker in a state socialist society has been in a position of dependence, not simply as an individual dependent on the state, but as a working person dependent on the place of work—in particular the industrial enterprise—as the direct provider of one’s basic life needs.”

¹⁵ Merle Fainsod, “The Komsomols—A Study of Youth under Dictatorship,” *The American Political Science Review* 45, no. 1 (1951): 18–40.

of the 1950s, the new youth working sites were called to participate in a real industrial epic where “the battle for energy” became the core of the official discourse.

Thousands of youth brigade members were mobilized for the construction of the power plant in Rovinari, one of the most important energy sites in the 1980s. This was the beginning of a continuous process of workforce formation destined to cover the deficit of labor for the Gorj County industrial operation. The actual setting up of the building site was witnessed by the former commander of SNT Rovinari:

The National Youth Working Site at the power plant of Rovinari was inaugurated in 1970. There were about 2,000 brigade members, including 800 drivers for the new machines. They all came from youth organizations from around the country. I was their commander and they came here to build this important industrial target. They were young and proud to be here, at this important moment. (I. R.)

Alongside the participation of “the brave young men, eager to build the industrial giants,” other testimonies speak of the militarization of labor in the region. A former miner from Gorj, interviewed in 2006, said that the construction of the power plant was also the result of the work of convicts and military personnel mobilized in the labor colonies:

The construction of colonies and of the power plant at Rovinari began in 1972–1973. Along with young people, many prisoners and many soldiers from various units around the country were brought to work at the site. At Fărcășești village there was a colony of convicts, and at Roșia there was another forced-labor colony of about 2,000 prisoners. It was under Decree No. 420, through which one could win his freedom more quickly. The decree said that if you go to work in a construction site, you served two days instead of one, and with your day of imprisonment you had three. But even so most of them were forced to go out to work. The power plant, as I remember, was built mainly by thieves and by soldiers from the army. (Gh. Z.)

Established under the ideological motto of the time—“More and more coal for our Motherland!”—the SNTR managed to mobilize young manpower and soon became a front-runner in the socialist competitions of the national working sites. In response to its booming “labor glory,” many young people asked to be sent to Rovinari. Parallel to recruitments through the youth organizations across the country, the press encouraged all young people to come to Rovinari “to learn a profession” or to “make their lives there,” stimulating their political consciousness so they can make contributions to carry on the magnificent plans elaborated by the party and state leadership.

“Thousands and thousands” of young people responded to this call and some decided to stay permanently in the country’s “youngest city.” For many of them coming to Rovinari meant a real adventure, as well as an opportunity to set up a family and a future. The “young” age of the city and the advantages offered

accounted for the high numbers of young people willing to come and settle in Rovinari. One of the interviewed participants emotionally recalls his first impressions on his arrival:

The beautiful thing, I tell you honestly, was that it was called “the city of youth.” Those who came to Rovinari were mainly young people: 2,000 workers and 8,000 students from all over the country came to the National Youth Working Site through Action 10,000. Young people learned a profession here and friendships were forged on and off work. I was the only one from my high school, but here I met almost fifty young people. We were a close-knit group. People of my age started to make families and then the first child came, then another. For [members of] my generation, who were around eighteen years old, work was not such a big thing. For some it was, but for us, the young people, what did we know? (L. L.)

In 1982 labor at the SNTR was supplied by students modeled on voluntary work camps, but by that time participation had become almost mandatory in high schools and universities. Each summer students were sent through Action 10,000. The headquarters of the working site was established in a nearby colony called “the cardboard city,” where students were accommodated in the carton shelters built by the first generation of brigade members.

The schools and the industrial vocational high schools in the region also had an important role in training the “young workers of tomorrow.” A kind of patronage emerged between the school and the industry: students were trained in vocational skills at school, while the employment units at the coalfield provided jobs after their graduation. The press hailed this model of the mine school, where the students could learn “firsthand” the secrets of operating the machinery at the mining quarries; they could start a job fresh from school and had a chance to establish themselves in their professional career. Propaganda had a crucial role in the vocational guidance of students. The aim was to create a positive attitude toward the mining professions, mostly through appeals to consciousness. The Mining High School of Rovinari, presented as one of the most prestigious educational mining profile establishments of Gorj County, was to play a formative role for the young people that had chosen to become miners:

Young men and women! If you choose one of the many jobs in mining, you’ll make a step toward the fulfillment of your ideals. The Mining High School of Rovinari gives you the possibility to gain professional qualification coupled with high efficiency and immediate employment in the quarries of I. M. Roșia and I. M. Rovinari, as well as unlimited training opportunities.¹⁶

Specialization and a guaranteed, presumably life-long job represented for many a chance for achievement in life. This is the reason why some regret today

¹⁶ D. Corcoveanu, “Liceul Minier Rovinari—în consens cu exigențele cincinalului calității și eficienței,” *Gazeta Gorjului*, 2 June 1981, 2.

the passing of communism that provided young people with a job and a home for life.

Mutual Work Assistance: The Sent-Over Workers (*Detașatii*)¹⁷

*Actions 4500, 7000, 10000*¹⁸



Figure 16.2. Geographical mobility of workers arriving in Rovinari.¹⁹

In the early 1980s as part of the vigorous industrialization process to ensure Romania's energy independence, a new set of labor policies introduced redeployment of the available workforce and technological equipment to the strategic branches of the heavy industry. The new concentration of labor took the shape of "mutual work assistance," an ideological symbol of workers' solidarity

¹⁷ *Detașatii* were workers that enterprises from the country had to deliver so as to cover the labor deficit generated by the recent industrialization of the *Rovinari bazin*. The policy, officially called "mutual work assistance," meant that several enterprises were requested to delegate for a period of six months (which was often prolonged to up to two years) a certain amount of its workers. Often, as members of the local collective recall, enterprises used this opportunity to get rid of the undesired and undisciplined workers. *Detașatii* is the way workers were called at the time of the considerable transfers of the labor force in the Rovinari Bazin and this denomination is very common among those, who recall the labor experience. It is very common to refer to this type of workers as *detașatii*.

¹⁸ Other actions that relocated manpower to the mining areas included Action *Gorj 81*, Action *Pitcoal Câmpu lui Neag*, Action *Roșia Poieni 81*, Action *Lignite-Horezu*.

¹⁹ Mihăilescu, ed., *Rovinari* '82, 17.

and cooperation toward the fulfillment of the socialist economic plans. One of the most significant strategies of “delivering” manpower in the Rovinari mine pool was represented by the famous Actions 4500, 7000, 10000, a real “shock force” raised to ensure the intensive mine exploitation in the area. The geographical mobility of those who came to work in Rovinari is charted below.

Enterprises from all over the country were called on to send a certain number of workers to serve at the economic and political disposal of the party for a period of time between six months and two years (and that could be prolonged for an unspecified period). Supplied with an impressive workforce that was sent over by force or arrived at their free will, the “work colony of Rovinari” rapidly transformed itself into an industrial city that was considered a “special city built for the miners.”²⁰

*Workers’ Identities and Moldavian Orientalism*²¹

The origins of those who came to work in Rovinari constituted a major factor that shaped the social and economic life of the city, considered for a long time a “dormitory town” destined to accommodate the influx of labor. The structure of the population can be analyzed along the rural/urban divide or according to geographic mobility (locals versus nonlocals).

The collective memory still preserves the image of a massive colonization of the area by workers coming from the Moldavian region. Accordingly, conflicts reproduced in the recollections generically take place between “Moldavians” and “Oltenians.” One aspect of the misunderstandings between the two groups concerned the confrontation between the self and the other, the barbarian. On one side, the local population claimed to be the primary, indigenous inhabitants of the region:

They thought they were going to find gold here. They saw the thermal power plant and what did they think? Ah, what a big eating hall! Well, that’s what the Moldavian said when he arrived. What can you expect from a man with no education and no God? From where they came they brought nothing but trouble. They came here to take my work, my house, and in some cases even my wife. (I. T.)

²⁰ In the local brochure the town’s emergence was attributed to the special attention that Nicolae Ceaușescu gave to the working class in general and miners in particular: “The profession of the miner is hard but noble, and it has its rigors. Make a city of miners, where they can feel at home or even better. A modern Rovinari for the next generations; as we ask from people, we should also reward them” (*Rovinari* ‘84 [local booklet], 3).

²¹ The expression is used by David Kideckel to represent the negative perception about the doubtful quality of the Moldavians who came to the mining zone of Jiu Valley. I use it in the present study to describe the so-called “colonization” of the Rovinari coalfield where the Moldavians were perceived as the “most dangerous elements among the *detașatii*.”

On the other side, the Moldavians considered themselves colonizers and saviors of this territory:

The great majority of the workers were Moldavians and the Oltenians loathed us. They called us drunkards, barbarians, and so on. We didn't care. In return we called them jealous and lazy people. Although they said bad things about the Moldavians, you should know that the Moldavians saved the people around here from hunger. They didn't know what civilization was until we came here. We had a saying: *Instead of killing a dog, you'd better bring it to Gorj as it would starve to death anyway.* And there was also another one, loud and clear: *Have you ever seen an egg hatch and an Oltenian work?* So many of us were saying that we'd better change this Rovinari placard and write on it: "The New Moldavia," because over 80% of us were Moldavians. (L. L.)

Social Engineering and the Workers' Everyday Life in the City

At first the center of Rovinari was chaotic and no targeted socialization efforts were envisaged to functionally integrate its new habitants, who were themselves divided across identities (rural/urban or local/nonlocal people). There were no cultural and social centers and no administrative institutions to prepare the new arrivals for their new social and labor roles. The construction of the city resulted in a monotonous space in the shape of a bedroom-city without a center and without a periphery.

The majority of those who settled in Rovinari mention three motivations for their choice: easy access to apartments, the generous food provisioning, and the high industrial wages. In the context of the shortage economy that the rest of the population was facing in the 1980s, these incentives²² contributed to the ideological and social construction of city of Rovinari as a welfare place with rapid and high chances of personal achievement. One of the interviewed persons remembers his first impressions of the city:

When I first came to Rovinari I was astonished with what I found here: they not only transferred me as a miner engineer, but also immediately gave me an apartment with three rooms.

²² The symbolic manipulation of the numbers of new apartments or food quantities presented Rovinari as a town in continuous renewal. The newspapers circulated this image by highlighting the rapid construction of apartments available for those who wanted to become permanent workers in the Rovinari coalfield operation. If at the end of 1980 "there were 370 newly built apartments equipped with all modern conveniences, in 1982 their number was already 9,000. One year later there were 2,000 new ones and 600 more were added in 1984. Another 1,500 are projected for 1985. Overall, 5,000 were built at a stunning pace. 5,000 three- and four-story buildings were built in just three years" (*Rovinari '84* [local booklet], 24). Praised as a "unique town for the pace of its growth and extension," on 3 July 1982 Rovinari was awarded by presidential decree the Order of Labor (3rd class) and the 3rd place in the National Socialist Competition. "A city without archives," Rovinari managed to carve a place for itself among the small industrial towns of the country.

The food stores were abundant and there were no rations. It was a kind of El Dorado for us. Imagine that I was coming from a place where everything was restricted and very hard to find, I had to queue almost daily in order to get food. And here I could get everything just like that. (F. G.)

Making a home in Rovinari depended on people's capacity to invest both affective and material resources in their new urban residence. After the Five-Year Plan of 1979–1984, official interest in the welfare of Rovinari decreased—and with it the hopes of the people building their future in the city.

Work, Professional Mobility, and Productivity

As the enterprises from the Rovinari platform were quite specialized and the available workforce heterogeneous, a marked trend of professional mobility was used to adapt workers to the specific new requirements. Almost 59% of qualified workers practiced a different profession than the one they had at their previous workplace:

Thus locksmiths were becoming miners, drivers, mechanics, mechanics drivers, etc. Affecting two-thirds of the Rovinari active population, the process of changing profession escalated beyond an acceptable peripheral development into a mass phenomenon. The quantitative and qualitative deficit of labor, considered by the management as the main cause for the underachievement of plans, was the result of inefficient use of the existing workforce and lack of control over the mass phenomenon of mobility.²³

Beside the workers relocated to the mining operations to fulfill the production plans, an entire apparatus of professionals, such as power engineers, construction workers, chemists, and especially supervisors, were sent to the area. The authorities used different strategies to attract more specialists, the most efficient being the easy promotion to different posts and the multiplication of decision-making functions. C. S., a former power engineer sent to Rovinari for a few months every year from 1979 until 1989, remembers:

Ordinary power engineers became well-paid superintendents. All sorts of management positions were created to provide more incentives. A power plant like Rovinari had seven managers and seven chief engineers, maybe more. More supervisors came up to double the [number of] managers, such as myself. This wasn't the case in other enterprises around the country. The thermal power was supplied through some strips that were always deteriorating so they had to continuously bring specialists to fix them. The Ministry of Energy was not only torturing its men by sending them here, they also punished the constructors of those machines; a couple of hotels were always filled with representatives of the Ministry of Machine Construction, the Ministry of Electrotechnics and the Ministry of Chemistry. In this way they created some interesting ad hoc societies of highly qualified specialists who practically did nothing but blame one another. (S. C.)

²³ Mihăilescu, ed., *Rovinari* '82, 3.

As for the relations between the workers and the power specialists, conflicts often appeared due to lack of communication and understanding of one's professional responsibilities:

Those who were in charge of the functioning of the thermal power plant didn't understand their responsibility, they were sleeping or leaving their post... such was the mentality. We can also talk about a certain worker tradition. If you go to Prahova, you can find staunch working traditions. That means a child seeing his father going regularly to work, day or night, and having some kind of attachment to his workplace. Here they were the first generation, and it's very hard to create a working mentality in one generation. They only came here to make money and earn their daily bread. They also knew that they could be sanctioned at any time by the local and external managers who were spying on them—because there were many of them. (M. S.)

The tasks to be fulfilled were outlined in the Five-Year Plan used by Ceaușescu as the main planning tool for running the national economy. The distortion of production data was meant to keep on the Romanian miracle of high growth rates of industrial production. False production rates were continuously announced in order to demonstrate that the plan was fulfilled or overachieved. The mechanism entered a vicious circle: the Five-Year Plan constantly grew so the reports had to be blown out of proportion. The gap between ideology and reality soon became too wide to bridge. The local folklore remembers anecdotally the way that production rates were manipulated:

Did they lie? It is like the joke with the sow: A sow was brought to the veterinarians to give birth. And it had only one sucking pig. So they said: "How can we report to comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu that there is only one pig? We will say there are ten pigs." And Ceaușescu comes and says: "What about the sow?" "Comrade Secretary, it had ten pigs." "Great. Give nine for export and one to the population." It happened like that. The party organs lied a lot to him. (N. C.)

Another recurrent story about the distortion of production numbers in the coal basin of Rovinari is related to the strategies used by the local workers to maintain operations:

Let me tell you about a situation at the Roșia quarry. They came and made an enclosure where they excavated, but they found little coal. "What should we do? There's not enough coal." So they painted black fuel oil on the other side to make it seem there was coal. When he [Ceaușescu] came by helicopter and saw the black stratum, he was impressed: "Wow, so much coal!" And the works went on. The coal was half a meter and they made it look it was four meters. They lied to him all the time. My personal opinion was that he didn't know. He really had the impression there was coal on the surface, on infinite surfaces. Because of the lies the country was destroyed. It wasn't the coal they saw in the initial prospects. It just wasn't! But it was too late to close down the plant. (N. C.)

In the newspapers the image of the excavators and bulldozers that competed in order to "overachieve the plan" was complemented by the reports about the

socialist competition between the industrial centers across the country. The representations of the official discourse that symbolically glorified the industrial identity of the city and coalfield of Rovinari can be found unaltered in the collective memory which stores and perpetuates them.

Peasants and Proletarians—Negotiating Identities

The transition from peasant to proletarian in the context of the socialist system meant a shift from the agricultural, mainly subsistence-oriented economy to wage-earning industrial labor. The particularity of this process, designated by the term proletarianization, stemmed from the nature of socialist industrialization and urbanization that put a high strain on the economy and social organization. In the case of Romania, the peasantry was the main labor reservoir used by the regime to form its working class. The increased labor demand for industrial employment at the Rovinari coalfield operations led to the emergence of various peasant household strategies that shaped the peasants' status both in terms of industrial relations and at home.

The Geographical Context: “Village Migration”

Industrialization “at any cost” meant a constructive transformation of the Gorjean space composed of hundreds of peasant households and agricultural fields. The mining industrial unit established an office which dealt specifically with the “village migration.” Regarded by the official discourse as a necessity for industrial development, the demolition of the villages appears in the local memory rather as a destruction of the traditional space and a profanation of the old settlements and customs of the local inhabitants:

Everything was being excavated. They destroyed villages and everything that stood in their way. Forests were cut down, churches and cemeteries were moved or demolished. People were uprooted, moved away from the places where they had been born, where they had their household and their ancestors. The coalfield practically ate their territory so people were forced to move away and start rebuilding their lives. (J. L.)

I was a *detasat* worker and had nothing to lose, but I know people from the around here who came back home from work and did not find their houses anymore. I was a bulldozer operator and they would send me to demolish the houses that stood in the way of the quarries. There are many tragic stories about people and their households that were moved by force. (S. N.)

Today both the local inhabitants and the mining specialists consider a mistake the town's positioning in the middle of the quarries—initially established so as to absorb the old work colonies and to be near the power station of Rovi-

nari—not only because it generated excessive noise and coal dust pollution (according to the stories, a clean shirt turns black in less than two hours), but also because it is believed that under the city there are enormous coal deposits lost forever for exploitation.

The Industrial–Agricultural Center of Rovinari: An Experiment in the Domestication of Industry²⁴

Established on 9 December 1981 by State Decree No. 366, the Industrial–Agricultural Center of Rovinari (CIA Rovinari) was constituted as an administrative entity that was supposed “to ensure the most adequate forms of collaboration between industrial and agricultural units and to coordinate activities at all levels in order to achieve a balance between industrial and agricultural work features and the labor engaged in these two fields.”²⁵ Both official and private discourse attribute the initiative for the establishment of CIA Rovinari to Nicolae Ceaușescu who was considered the heroic founder of the entire mining coalfield. The mining industry, which managed to absorb the majority of the peasants and agricultural workers in the region, was called to sustain the needs of the “agrarian revolution.” In this context, the regime pursued a policy of involving industrial workers in the development of the region’s agricultural objectives:

It is not enough to have people working in industry. We should give the workers from Gorj the possibility to work in agriculture as well, so that the rural environment can develop. We have to get the villages closer to industry. There should be mutual support between the agricultural and the industrial fields on a macro level as well as on a micro level.²⁶

Thus a new category of workers appeared: the so-called flexible workers. These were industrial workers who did agricultural work “after their industrial program” or by seasonal labor in the agricultural sector. The former first secretary of the CIA Rovinari explained in an interview the informal strategy he used in order to cope with the new situation:

As long as I worked here, until 1984, agricultural labor was provided by the workers I mobilized from the enterprises belonging to the Mining Career of Rovinari. Each season they were taken out to plant 150 hectares of potatoes and then collect the harvest. It is true, however, that this work was not quite voluntary. Each worker would supply himself with potatoes for the whole winter as nobody checked their bags. All this was done after they completed their working program. They had a timetable. (I. R.)

²⁴ W. Gerald Creed, “Agriculture and the Domestication of Industry in Rural Bulgaria,” *American Ethnologist* 23, no. 3 (1995): 528–48.

²⁵ Mihăilescu, ed., *Rovinari* '82, 3.

²⁶ *Rovinari* '84 (local booklet), 6.

Working in these seasonal brigades created opportunities for the workers to access a source of goods that could be “privatized.” Given the regime of permanent shortages, theft from the state workplace was considered legitimate; the workers felt entitled to take certain products in exchange for their work. This strategy of combining difficulties to gain unofficial advantages is illustrated by what Gerald Creed has called “conflict complementarities”—the use of unofficial measures appears as a kind of “necessary evil” where the “informal give and take” relation is employed in order to deal with the scarcity of labor and goods.

The Mixed Household: Worker in the Enterprise, Peasant in the Household

The proximity of the mines and the new industrial employment opportunities offered to the rural population from the nearby villages led to the emergence of the mixed household of peasant-worker as the dominant type of unit at the CIA Rovinari.²⁷ The mixed household sought to maximize its resources through a gender-based division of labor which assigned to women the internal responsibilities of agricultural and domestic activities in the household, while men usually found wage-paid work outside providing a complementary source of sustenance:

The village had limited resources. We lived only off my household produce and very often it was hard to make ends meet. In order to get something, you had to work at the mine. If you wanted to change the gas cylinder, you had to be hired at the mine; if you wanted to buy bread, it was the same. So I decided with my wife that she would take care of the household and children—I had four—and I would commute daily to the town to work at the mine. It was very easy to get a job there because they needed a lot of labor. I invested all my wage earnings to support my household in the village. (N. B.)

Many of those who migrated to Rovinari to become workers at the mine stayed in touch with their relatives and continuously exchanged products between the village and the town. C. F., who came to Rovinari in 1984, underlined this trade that was based on mutual interdependency:

When we went in the countryside, in Moldova, we took from the town products like oil, sugar, coffee, pepper, cinnamon. And it was fantastic to see the face of my aunts when we

²⁷ According to a survey about the occupational distribution within the households at CIA Rovinari (Mihăilescu, ed., *Rovinari '82*), 65% were mixed peasant-worker households, 26% were only agrarian households, and the remaining 9% were only wage-earning households. Based on a structure of occupational distribution which combined wage-paid work with agricultural activities, the mixed household served a twofold function for the socialist village: on the one hand, it ensured access to economic resources and services for the rural population; on the other hand, in the context of labor shortage, it provided the industrial sector with a significant source of labor.

gave them a little pack of coffee. In exchange I would take from the village domestic food products such as wine, eggs, meat, etc. We brought other goods, too, such as radios, TV sets, and clothes, which one of my brothers sold in the village. Some of my neighbors even made me a list with the products they wanted from the city each time I came home. Of course, I had my share of the deal. At that time the city of Rovinari was very well supplied and it was a pity not to take advantage of it. (C. F.)

The strategy of the mixed household was not based on unilateral exchange from the town to the village. The shortage economy that dominated the 1980s reciprocally tied city dwellers to their peasant households for the provision of basic foodstuffs:

After 1985 things started to collapse and there was hunger everywhere. People started migrating back to their villages or brought food from the village because in the town there were queues everywhere. Everything was going down, the food, the housing, the standard of living in general. So from the "horn of plenty" as it was once considered, Rovinari became in the late 1980s a deserted town. (S. N.)

The household strategies used by the peasant-workers to maximize their investment of work and time were negotiated within a system of social and economic networks. For instance, respondents often reported the concessions that the local administration would make to the workers from the nearby villages at the height of the agricultural season when their labor was much needed in their household. The workers' power to negotiate depended on their relations with their employer and the mutual advantages implied:

My boss knew very well that I would take my leave during the autumn harvest and he often gave me some days more as he knew he would get his share. For a couple of wine bottles and several sacks of potatoes I could overstay for as long as I wanted. All the workers who had land in the village made this deal, so imagine, say, 300 workers that took leave at once at harvest and they [the employers] had nothing to say about it. (S. N.)

Given the shortage of labor, the socialist state which depended heavily on the workforce of the mixed peasant-worker households had to tolerate the workers' strategies of coping with multiple tasks during times of pressure such as the harvest period. The informal mechanisms used by the workers in order to obtain favors in the workplace amounted to "informal privatization of work time" through which industrial work was domesticated by the priority given to private ends. The industrial time was thus "stolen" by the private practices of the workers pursuing their own interests.²⁸

²⁸ The government's control over everyday life, for instance, through the so-called "etatization of leisure time" (see Katherine Verdery, *Socialismul. Cea a fost și ce urmează* [Iași: Institutul European, 2003]) was countered by this "privatization of work time" done mainly through practices such as work absenteeism, prolonged coffee breaks, shoddy labor, etc. (see David A. Kideckel, *Colectivism și singurătate în satele românești* [Iași: Polirom, 2006]).

Although one of the generic goals of socialist industrialization was to gradually transform the peasants into proletarians, in reality it created a “semi-proletarian” or “semi-rural” labor force that remained loyal to the household. The mixed-work household strategies that the peasants used were intended to supplement resources for the household. Working in the industry made them consider themselves as important people, responsible for the future of their village families and households.

Conclusions and New Beginnings

The symbolic and material investment in workers’ industrial performance was one of the central strategies employed by the socialist state in its plans for the construction of the new industrial proletariat. The case study of working-class formation strategies at the city of Rovinari presents a local context of putting in practice the national plan of socialist industrialization and urbanization. The privileged status of miners who were regarded as the “archetype of the working class” was enforced by the ideological discourse which attributed to this special category of workers a strategic place in the socialist economy. Although it proved to be a rather short-lived and limited strategy of buying peoples’ hope, in the local workers’ memory the access to privileges such as apartments, good food provisioning, and, perhaps most importantly, a stable job in an industrial enterprise, has engendered nostalgic reminiscences of the communist “Golden Age.” For the people of Rovinari the memory of everyday life and work conditions is reconsidered according to their present situation. Following the restructuring of the heavy industry after 1989, the miners, formerly “spoiled” by the communist state, had to negotiate their professional identity in the new market economy. This was the beginning of the so-called deindustrialization or deconstruction of the former industrial workers who were perceived as the direct legacy of the communist regime and therefore an obstacle on the path to the capitalist market economy.

17. “We Build for Our Country!” Visual Memories about the Brigadier Movement

Tsvetana Manova

My family—my ancestors and their ancestors—were all native inhabitants of the town of Pernik. Therefore, it is my place, a place I did not choose or want, but cannot change for another. My earliest childhood coincided with the construction of some important industrial plants—such as the steel foundry plant, the heavy metallurgy plant, the machine-building plant among others. All of them were built with the unpaid labor of thousands of young people who were deeply convinced that they were building the future of their town. My generation grew up with their enthusiasm and selflessness, which were widely popularized. In the decades to come, the brigade movement became a part of the lives of a whole generation of Bulgarians. In the cultural memory of this generation, the brigade movement had a positive image, an image I tried to disentangle by collecting the visual memories on the subject.

The motto in the title was a popular socialist slogan in Bulgaria during the latter half of the twentieth century. It was born shortly after the Second World War and the advent of the people’s democratic government when the Bulgarian Workers Party (Communists) declared itself for “a policy of rapid, stimulated industrial growth, including in the heavy industry, with an emphasis on large-scale, state-owned production.”¹ The party then appealed to the nation’s youth to volunteer and take part in the construction of important sites to bail the country out of the grave economic crisis. Young people “driven by their patriotic consciousness to rebuild their motherland and to ensure its successful future” responded readily and enthusiastically by the thousands and contributed volunteer brigadier labor to the recovery of the agricultural sector and the national

¹ Evgenia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bilgarskite prekhodi, 1939–2005* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 84.

economy.² Slogans are widely regarded as a “reflection of what the mass consciousness perceives to be significant” and are by extension a symptom of that consciousness.³ They allow unmistakable conclusions to be made about the state of society at a given stage of its evolution and the inherent stereotypes of its mentality and practice. Slogans are usually short-lived and “during times of tumultuous social changes they age literally by the hour.”⁴ “We build for our country,” however, remained valid for years to come, especially in the villages where the local youth actively worked on the construction of major national projects. The generation born in the 1940s still remembers it and in their minds “the brigadier movement was undoubtedly one of the most remarkable manifestations of public life in New Bulgaria.”⁵ The slogan has lastingly lodged itself in the cultural memory of an entire generation and is characterized by “continuity, continued existence” because “the socially fixed framework has remained sufficiently relevant” not only through the second half of the 1940s, but throughout the following decades as well.⁶

The economic, sociopolitical, and cultural life of a community during a specific historical period is best portrayed in representational documentary materials that bear informational significance in their own right, such as photographs.⁷ The language of visual information is precise, and it communicates directly and comprehensively certain facets of a person’s lifestyle and culture. When sought out thematically and systematically, and organized specifically for the purposes of cultural research and scholarly analysis, the photographic documentary material is no longer an illustration to a text. They become part of the text because their very nature makes them full-bodied historical sources, variously called “the visual memory of history” or “the art of visible truth.”⁸ This approach is particularly fruitful if we look back into “visible” time and compare retrospective visual documents against similar material from the preceding and the following periods. This chapter applies this approach to materials from Pernik during several consecutive historical periods with a particular focus on the brigadier movement.

² Vladimir Migevev, “Niakoi momenti ot istoriata na brigadirskoto dvizhenie v Bilgariia 1946–1989,” in *Stranitsi ot brigadirskiia letopis. Brigadirskoto dvizhenie v Bilgariia*, eds. M. Panaiotova and J. Panaiotov (Ruse: Dîrzhaven arkhiv Ruse, 2005), 7.

³ Angel Petrov, *Lozungî. Bilgarinî izleze na ploshtadite* (Sofia: Bilgarska akademiia na naukite, 1994), 153.

⁴ Ibid., 8.

⁵ Georgi Dimitrov, “Telegrama do okoliiskiia komitet na revolucionniia mladezhki sîyuz v Pernik (1945),” in *Georgi Dimitrov i perniskata mladezh*, ed. M. Anachkov (Pernik: V. Andreev, 1982), 37–39.

⁶ Jan Assman, *Kulturnata pamet* (Sofia: Planeta 3, 2001), 32.

⁷ Dora Popsavova, *Fotografските snimki kato istoricheski izvori* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1984), 7.

⁸ Ibid., 27.

At the dawn of the twentieth century the city of Pernik was a medium-sized village with approximately 2,000 residents. With the discovery and development of a coal field on the village grounds, coal mining became the leading local industry and a magnet for unprecedented migration in both scope and continuity. For many decades before the advent of socialism and the profound changes it entailed in all spheres of life, job-seekers of different social standing from all over the country were settling in the mining village of Pernik, creating "the preconditions and the objective basis for their blending into a new, hitherto unknown social and ethnographic community."⁹ The village population grew tenfold for thirty years, becoming a township, and Pernik was Bulgaria's energy hub, extracting 96% of the nation's coal output.¹⁰ Almost immediately after 1944, the city turned into a construction site clustering Bulgaria's largest metal-working, energy, and machine-building plants. The town's population reached 100,000 and the city became the "industrial heart of Bulgaria." After the democratic changes that swept Bulgaria during the 1990s, the plants in Pernik quickly shut down and the population diminished, while the city lost many of its nearly century-old characteristics. All these developments were captured on photographic documentary material that should be regarded as primary historical evidence.

The collection of the material was not easy, and I was guided by following a historical approach aiming for comprehensiveness. It was not only a matter of finding representative photographs from the period, but also selecting the ones that capture the most characteristic features of life's events and the logic of the changes taking place in the village. Chronicle photos and reportage photographs prevail in the collection as I wanted to touch on multiple aspects of the life of the local community. Materials were sourced from the private visual archives of old Pernik families and from the collections of the Regional Historical Museum, the Territorial State Archive, and the Pernik Regional Library.

Since it is impossible to analyze the entire body of thematically diverse photographs (around 800 photos), I will concentrate on a small group of pictures which document the most characteristic trait of socialist construction in Pernik, the brigadier movement. It eloquently portrays the participation of men and women of different age and social standing in the creation of the physical infrastructure of socialism in a massively expanding socialist city, as well as how these events continue to live on in the cultural memory of the local community. I personally conducted the ethnographic interviews between 2006 and 2009.

After 1944, the Fatherland Front government found a dramatic drop of industrial output compared to the prewar period and a severely crippled agricul-

⁹ Georgi Georgiev, *Sofia i sofiantsi 1878–1944* (Sofia: Nauka i izkustvo, 1983), 5.

¹⁰ Tsvetana Manova, "Mestata za obshtuvane v stariia Pernik," *Izvestiia na regionalniia istoricheski muzei Ruse, Gradit*, 8 (2004): 197.

tural sector.¹¹ The government's main task was "to rebuild the economy and to step up economic development with the combined effort of all productive segments of society."¹² As early as the fall of 1944, many young volunteers helped with the harvest in the rural areas, filling in for the villagers who were mobilized in the war against Germany.¹³ The process was facilitated by the fact that the working class in Pernik was formed chiefly by impoverished villagers as a result of land fragmentation. At that time most of them were still living in the villages and working in the city, returning to their rural homes at the end of the day. They were working in the mines but were not yet disengaged from the mental attitudes of the peasantry. In many places volunteer labor days were held to clean the cities, build drinking fountains and bridges, and dig up roads (Figures 17.1., 17.2.).



Figure 17.1. A youth brigade from Pernik aids local agriculture in the village of Reianovtsi.

When on 14 January 1945 a Bulgarian industrial delegation met with Georgi Dimitrov in Moscow, he pointed out the extreme urgency to "mobilize all internal national resources in order to lift the country out of its dire economic situation and strengthen our homeland."¹⁴ In Pernik the necessary organization to

¹¹ Dimităr Trifonov, "Kovachnitsa na chestni i tvırđi kharakteri," in *Razgrıstane na masovoto mladezhko brigadirsko dvizhenie 1946–1950* (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1968), 54–113.

¹² Kalinova and Baeva, *Bilgarskite prekhodi*, 81.

¹³ TsDA, Fond 22, op. 1, a.e. 454, p. 12.

¹⁴ Georgi Dimitrov, "Telegrama do Okoliiskıia komitet na Revoliutsionniia mladezhki sŕiuz v Pernik," in *Do otechestvenofrontovska Bilgaria*, ed. M. Anazhkova (Sofia: BRP/k/, 1945), 122.

support the nascent "people's economy" was established with remarkable ease and enthusiasm. There are many and various reasons for that. In a mining city where workers accounted for the majority of the population, Marxist ideas took hold very early. In the first decades of the twentieth century Pernik emerged as "a class fortress" and "a buttress of the party" under the direct and personal



Figure 17.2. Volunteer brigade lays water mains for the Pernik–Kalkas conduit.

leadership of Dimitrov, who later became secretary general of the Communist International, as well as the leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party and head of the Bulgarian state. Through all those years he maintained continuous and close contacts with the Pernik miners who had not only been "on the frontline of working-class struggle in the past," but would always "uphold revolutionary class positions."¹⁵ In one of his numerous telegrams to the Pernik miners dispatched in the first months of the people's democratic rule, Dimitrov called Pernik a "glorious" and "heroic" city and told the miners that "the eyes of the nation, industry, and the country are fixed on them."¹⁶ The revolutionary youth organization, which during the capitalist period had been "the most steadfast helper and reserve of the Bulgarian Workers Party," surfaced from the underground after 9 September 1944 and was quickly reformed and legalized to become the most popular youth organization and a school inculcating a Marxist-Leninist worldview. The first legal national conference of the Revolutionary Youth Union (*Revolutsionen Mladezhki S'iyuz* [RMS]) held in March 1945

¹⁵ Ibid., 123.

¹⁶ Georgi Dimitrov, *Rechi, dokladi i statii* (Sofia: BRP/k/, 1947), vol. 3, 16–17.

called for mass youth participation in the establishment of industrial life in Bulgaria. On 8 January 1945 four hundred RMS members from Pernik carried out the first “sibotnik” (volunteer work Saturday) in Bulgaria, shipping hundreds of tons of coal to the capital.¹⁷ For the workers and the young people in Pernik the “party bidding” to take part in the rehabilitation of the economy and the industry was a matter of personal duty and honor: “Dozens of workers and intellectuals, largely young people, who had no material gain but followed an exalted ideal, sacrificed their day off on Sundays to go out in the villages and help their brethren in the arduous days of economic devastation.”¹⁸ Parallel to youth brigades from the industrial enterprises, early 1945 saw another new movement—the so-called “labor culture brigades” to aid villages. During the summer months the workers were joined by intellectuals and professionals—doctors, dentists, obstetricians, agronomists, artisans, and actors.¹⁹ Once the brigade mode of organizing production was introduced and established, competitions and shock-working gained wide popularity. Labor culture brigades from Pernik often were regional champions in the competition and received their prize, “the flag of the championship,” from the hands of Prime Minister Dimitrov (Figure 17.3.).

At first the idea to support the agricultural sector found followers in the Pernik machine-building plant where several people organized the workers and regularly led brigades to the villages to work out in the field. That is reflected in many life stories: “I went everywhere they sent us and my wife went, too. We men mowed and the women made hay. In the autumn we pulled out potatoes and picked fruit. It happened when the village needed us. We worked a lot there, but there was a lot of fun, too” (Mitko Borisov, b. 1930). The first months of 1945 recorded the creation of 143 brigades in Pernik. In the following years their number continued to grow along with the expanding scope of their activities. In 1945, 1946, and 1947 the labor culture brigades from Pernik contributed gratuitous labor to the recovery of the Bulgarian economy estimated at 4 million Bulgarian leva.²⁰

Women also joined the movement. The local women’s association had forty labor culture brigades with 1,250 participants who helped with the harvest, planted trees on the nearby hills, built roads, cleaned orchards, carted off earth from the mining galleries, and sewed children’s clothes for the new childcare establishments. Documentary material from the period informs us that in 1946 women’s brigades put in 40,000 workdays worth approximately 12 million leva.²¹ They reported their achievements at women’s rallies and gatherings (Figure 17.4.).

¹⁷ “Editorial,” *Rabotnichesko delo* 17, no. 192, 2 May 1945.

¹⁸ Pencho Kubadinski, *Brigadirski ogniove* (Sofia: Narodna mladezh, 1986), 16.

¹⁹ Trifonov, “Kovachnitsa,” 8.

²⁰ *Doklad na Okrǎzhniia komitet na Dimitrovskiiia komunisticheski mladezhki sǎyuz po sluchai 30-godishniia iubilei na brigadirskoto dvizhenie v Bǐlgaria*, 1977, Pernik; Teritorialen dǐrzhaven arhiv, fond 13, opis 1, arhivna edinitsa 144, 8.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 9.



Figure 17.3. The district champion labor culture brigade that received the champion's flag personally from Georgi Dimitrov.



Figure 17.4. A rally of the women's association in Pernik, 1945.

In May 1946 the capital Sofia hosted the First Congress of the Bulgarian Democratic Fatherland Youth. The congress disclosed a remarkable figure, reporting that the young people of Bulgaria had bestowed on their country 4 million work-days in agriculture and construction of local economic projects. A resolution was adopted, calling on young people to build major national infrastructure like dams, railroads, mountain passes, and industrial plants. The Democratic Youth Central Committee penned an appeal to the nation's youth: "Young men and women ... we shed our blood for freedom, but now we must work for the creation of a powerful industrial and agricultural country, and labor is our most powerful weapon."

The creation of the youth brigadier movement drew on national experience in 1945 and 1946 as well as youth experience in the Soviet Union and in other Eastern bloc countries, notably, Yugoslavia. On 21 January 1947 an extended plenum of the RMS Central Committee adopted a special decision about "participation of the young people in the country's construction ... through national and local construction brigades." That paved the way for a significant achievement: the construction of the most important targets of the first Biannual National Economic Plan—the Khaim Boaz pass over the Balkans, the Pernik–Voluiak, Liaskovets–Zlataritsa, Samuil–Silistra, and Lovech–Troian railways, the Koprinka and Rositsa dams, Dimitrov's eponymous town Dimitrograd, and countless other plants and factories built with volunteer youth brigadier labor.

The volunteer recruitment campaign involved mass canvassing at rallies, youth editions, appeals, and talks not only inside the Revolutionary Youth Union but also in the structures of all other youth organizations active at the time. The goal was to make sure that "no young person will be left unawares of what young people are about to build" because in addition to its contribution to physical construction, the brigadier movement was expected to be a "mass school educating and reeducating the young men and women of our country."²² The result was that in 1947 alone the brigadier movement involved 193,000 young people.²³ One of the hardest and most important national infrastructure projects was the Pernik–Voluiak railroad, which was expected to generate savings for the Bulgarian economy in the range of 200–400 million leva a year. The new railroad would provide transportation for coal coming from the mines in Pernik, the Struma basin, and Bobovdol to other regions of the country. Even more importantly, the new railway would connect the Baltic countries, Ukraine, Romania, and north Bulgaria to Greece through Dupnitsa, Kulata, and Demirhissar, and with Macedonia and Albania through Kyustendil. The project's goals and significance were vastly publicized in order to motivate young volunteers.

The national youth brigade enrolled 50,000 volunteers and was again named after Georgi Dimitrov, who was now the country's prime minister. All five bat-

²² Tsentralen partien arhiv, fond 6, opis 2, arhivna edinita 52, list 860.

²³ Trifonov, "Kovachnitsa," 61.

talions and the respective units, groups, and bands were named after deceased Bulgarian revolutionaries and antifascists. The First Pernik Battalion which built the Pernik–Voluiak railroad took the name of the nineteenth-century poet and revolutionary Khristo Botev. Brigadier members included workers, high school and university students, teachers, assistants, professors, and even priests (Figure 17.5): "The brigadier recruitment campaign was in full sway. Everywhere the targets were exceeded. It was even necessary to take measures to limit enrolment because the conditions at the sites did not allow taking in more brigadiers than the fixed number."²⁴ Brigadier correspondence, memoirs, and creative works from 1947 show the pathos and enthusiasm shared by the young builders and by most of the nation. This is common for the initial phase of every revolution and the socialist revolution was no exception (Figure 17.6.).



Figure 17.5. Members of the youth construction brigade headquarters for the Pernik–Voluiak railroad and the leader of the priests' band. The autumn of 1947.

When a competition was launched between bands, units, and battalions, all young people stepped in. Even a mother and son engaged on different national sites competed against each other. Mara Toncheva from the Georgi Benkovski unit challenged her son, who was a brigadier in the Pernik Battalion. The father's telegram encouraged them both: "Ahead with the competition! Triumph, my son! Don't fall back, mother! This way, Bulgaria wins!"²⁵ Another brigadier, St. Bozhilov, remembers:

²⁴ Kubadinski, *Brigadirski ogniove*, 16.

²⁵ Otchetan doklad za rabotata na mladezhata, 1979, Teritorialen dırzhaven arkhiv, Pernik, fond 1, opis 3, arhivna edinitsa 17, list 5.

And now, the final onslaught. In November and December work was done by the Fourth Extra Shift, which was attacking tunnel number 3 at the Radui Camp and the unfinished sites. It was incredibly difficult. The howling winter wind was cutting through our bodies, our fingers could barely hold on to the pick axe. Instead of decorating the Christmas tree, seventy-two girls were on the spot, turning their backs on home comforts, oblivious of sleep and rest. On 1 January 1948, tunnel number 3 was completely finished. Yet another page of the brigadier chronicle was closed. The youth railroad Pernik–Voluiak, 54 km long, was presented as a New Year’s gift to our Motherland.²⁶



Бригадири от Студена на обект "Димитрови кошари" - октомври 1947 г.

Figure 17.6. Brigadiers from Studena village at the Dimitrovi Koshari construction site. The Pernik–Voluiak railroad, October 1947.

A rhymed letter from the brigadier St. Trenev to his beloved (September 1947) vividly betrays the young man’s emotional commitment to the idea that by working on the Pernik–Voluiak railroad, he is building the future of his country and his people:

I’m in the brigade and in town
you are busy all day long.
We are building a new life
where work is a song.
Day and night rocks we blast
and earth is piled sky-high,

a train will cross as it must
through goat-untrodden rubble.
But when you hear
the youth train a-coming,
run up to meet me, proudly
and happily, joyfully humming...²⁷

²⁶ Teritorialen dŭrzhaven arkhiv, Pernik, fond 1, opis 3, arhivna edinitsa 144, list 7.

²⁷ Tsvetana Manova, personal archive.

This memory is refracted in the mindset of the following generation with the present-day comment of the man's daughter who provided the letter: "They were doing something meaningful, their intentions were fair and pure, and today we see that less and less often. One cannot live without ideals and dreams about the future" (Ivanka Treneva, b. 1959). A photograph has captured the mourning rally after a flood at Deliiian Camp killed fourteen young people. A telling sign about the enthusiasm of the times was that their names were later used by other bands, units, and brigades, thus "setting" a framework for memory. Another compelling sign is that their parents, relatives, and friends instantly took their place.

A considerable body of texts from the socialist period dedicated to the brigadier movement is highly appreciative of the significance and results of the young people's participation in a process that laid the groundwork of socialism in Bulgaria. The predominant assessments, however, underline the outcome of ideological instruction for the young people and characterize the brigadier movement as a school of political and moral formation of new people, the builders of socialism. During the brigadier months and years the Bulgarian Workers Party (Communists) and the Popular Youth Union carried out an extensive, targeted, and consistent program of political awareness and ideological education. Some of its forms were already familiar from the days of underground struggle, but there were new additions as well, such as collective readings of Soviet literature, political awareness groups, study clubs for the First Biannual National Economic Plan, short political talks, brigadier newspapers, brochures and news sheets, or one-on-one work to advance the political consciousness of each and every brigadier. The same period gave rise to a new, brigadier holiday system that subsequently provided the basis for the socialist holiday system. All-town celebration rallies were organized for the brigades' departures and arrivals and for the commencement and completion of works. The handover of completed projects was accompanied by rallies in the central streets of the nation's capital, Sofia. There were award ceremonies for the champions in the competition, camp fires, camp brigadier songs, and more (Figure 17.7.). In the public domain the brigadier movement was characterized as "selfless labor heroism," a "feat of unseen self-abnegation," a "foundry of characters honest and firm," and its results were "amazing." This feeling sank deeply in the memories that were reflected in life stories or texts committed to paper in later times. The brigadiers themselves coined new slogans: "We want new works," "We build for our country," "We build the railroad and the railroad builds us," to name but a few. The government and the party steered political activism and encouraged any and all actions among brigadiers. The fulfillment of the First Biannual National Economic Plan was announced with public celebrations. At the brigadier celebration marking a completed stretch in the construction of the Pernik–Voluiak railroad, Chairman of the People's Republic

Vasil Kolarov said: “A free nation builds its own future with its own hands.” His words became a long-standing motto.²⁸ The Bulgarian Communist Party’s comprehensive, targeted, and consistent ideological work with young people determined their political thinking and behavior for a long time. When Dimitrov passed away, dozens of youth worker collectives from the plants in Pernik pledged “allegiance to the working people.” In the following years all professional and general city holidays displayed bright political colors (Figure 17.8.).



Figure 17.7. Albanian and Bulgarian brigadiers heading for brigadier celebrations at the city park in Pernik, 1947.

The slogan “We build for our country” was first launched on national construction projects built by young people in 1946–1948. In an ethnographic interview a participant in the brigadier movement defined it as “the creed of an entire generation and of the young people in general for years to come” (Emil Iglev, b. 1929). From our perspective the slogan is also a symbol of the identity and self-identification of a sizeable segment of society during a specific time period. A group of people collectively experienced an essentially revolutionary time which shaped their self-assessment as a special community making a significant contribution to public life. To this day the living bearers of this collective memory go back in time and reconstruct entire tableaux of memory:

²⁸ “Pismo do bashtata na tragicchno zaginalata Kunka Ivanova na liniyata Pernik–Voluiak,” *Rabotnichesko delo* 19, no. 163, 18 July 1947, 3.

I remember Ivan Tunchev from Kostenets. He was not yet fifteen and he wasn't signed in to be brigadier, but nonetheless on 27 March 1947 there he was. He showed up at the Virli Briag Camp at the construction of the Pernik–Voluiak railroad because he couldn't go back to the village and say he wasn't allowed to go. B. Cheresharov from Dolna Bania joined the brigade in his homemade slippers but that didn't prevent him from becoming a shock-worker.²⁹

As a young family my wife and I were building the panorama road on Vitosha. Before that, in high school, I took part in the construction of the Pernik–Voluiak railroad. Those were the years of enthusiasm. I'm seventy-seven years old now. We lived with dignity and now, in our old age, we have very good memories, and we nostalgically look back.³⁰



Figure 17.8. All-town rally on Miner's Day, 1953.

Once the construction of the Pernik–Voluiak railroad was completed, a new youth county brigade was immediately formed to build a steel plant:

The brigadier camp was about 300 yards from our house. Mornings and evenings young men and women in blue shirts went and came back from the sites singing, donating gratuitous labor to their homeland. Bonfires often illuminated the nights and the neighborhood rang with songs and youthful hubbub. We worked to expand the steel machine-building plant. Our unit was the champion among the brigades. We worked tirelessly. At the end of the shift I was presented with the Shock-Worker Brigadier Badge. Next summer, after finishing high school, I again signed up to be brigadier. In the first ten days our band was already declared to be the champion. We were given two red flags, one for champion band and one for champion brigade. We carried them to work and in the evening they fluttered at the tent's entrance. One evening Krístio Goranov came to visit the brigade. When he saw the two red flags, he composed a tune from the top of his head and started humming: "Two red banners fly over our

²⁹ Liuben Delchev, "Nashata brigadirska mladost," *Treta vízrast*, 5 May 2009, 13.

³⁰ Nikola Reliovski, "Nashata brigadirska mladost," *Treta vízrast*, 4 February 2009, 13.

tent.” It became the band’s anthem. For me and my schoolmates the two brigadier summers were an educational school of labor, comradeship, and collectivism. Unforgettable brigadier days!”³¹

Another reminiscence describes the same brigade:

The Blagoy Gebrev youth county brigade was established in 1948 to build the steel plant. Three hundred young people signed up for the first shift. We were handed uniforms and we were put up in barracks that were built especially for the brigade, although the buildings weren’t yet completely finished. We started on the 25th of April. On the following morning we woke up and there was snow on our blankets. But who cares, we were building the plants of Bulgaria! The brigade commander was S. Bozhilov, who had worked earlier on the Pernik–Voluiak rail construction. During the brigade he married a band member from the first band, Tsvetanka. The entire brigade went to their wedding. We marched out singing in ranks from one of the city hills where the barracks were, then crossed the entire city center and sang our way up to the other hill where the wedding was taking place. Those were wonderful times! (M. Mladenov, b. 1930)

The study of the enormous body of oral, written, and visual memories of the initial phase of the brigadier movement in Bulgaria and in Pernik in particular, dating from the late 1940s and the early 1950s, indicates that these memories share identical characteristics. They are unequivocally positive. The analysis of the factual history is beyond the scope of our interest. For all practical purposes we are concerned only with the memory about events and not the events per se, since “what matters for cultural memory is not factual but memorized history.”³² The central theme in the memories about the brigadier movement is the feeling of a meaningful presence in public life, the heroism of the times, a sense of belonging to a certain collective, and a spirit of celebration. The brigadier construction sites were places that triggered powerful socialization processes. They offered all the necessary conditions for the formation of youth collectives that determined and shaped the memory of their members.³³ The recounted memories clearly indicate that all circumstances were special, events were not mundane, and perceptions were unusually sharp, making the collective experience of brigadier times truly unforgettable for several decades. The bearers of these memories feel they do not belong to a common, mundane identity; the collective brigadier identity is exceptionally solemn.³⁴ During a specific time period these memories created and impressed on the local communities a new geography where the Pernik–Voluiak road, the Khaim Boaz pass, and other

³¹ Stanish Bonev, “Moiata mladost premina v Pernik,” in *Nashata mladost i zriialost: Spomeni na deitsi ot grad Pernik*, L. Petrov i M. Liubomirov (Pernik: Argus, 2008), 10.

³² Assman, *Kulturnata pamet*, 50.

³³ Ibid., 34–35.

³⁴ Ibid., 51.

"brigadier" sites were charged with a new meaning. The memory of brigadier labor in these places is so dense that even Pernik's urban toponymy obtained new features: sixty years later the area where brigadier housing quarters were provided is still called Brigadier.

At the end of the 1950s after the completion of the collectivization process, help was constantly needed in the agricultural sector to gather the harvest.³⁵ All young people joined the labor brigades in the countryside. In the middle of the 1960s nearly half a million people took part in the brigadier movement and it continued to expand.³⁶ Dozens of sites across the city were renovated, modernized, and built with the brigadier labor of school-based, neighborhood and worker groups. Local high school brigades were actively involved in the construction of the Peace Stadium, the new heating power plant, and the Metal Works Youth Cultural House in the 1950s; the Ferromagnetic Factory in the 1960s; the hockey ring and one of the community club buildings (*chitalishte*) in the 1970s. There was hardly any major construction in Pernik and the former Pernik district without the direct engagement of youth brigades.

There was already the metal works plant and the workers were mostly young people but we didn't have a culture house where they could have fun and hang out. They said there was no money for a culture house. One day I brought them together and said: "How about building it ourselves?" People in the production units started talking, we gathered together, talked it over at Komsomol meetings, and we decided to go ahead. They had a project designed for us, it was a gift. We got hold of master workers to tell us what to do and how, and we started—every day after work the young men would go digging. We had been digging for a while and people in the city started talking about the house. Industrial Minister Tano Tzolov shows up and says: "What do you think you're doing? How come you're building by yourselves?" We shut up and stared. He hung around, talked to the plant's manager and said: "We'll give money for a culture house and specialists will build it, you'll only be helping them." That's how in the 1960s we built ourselves a culture house but now, after the plant shut down, it's deserted, empty, there is no life there. Later young people built the hockey ring, too. There was a hockey player at the plant, it was his idea, so the municipality picked a spot for us and we did it. It's deserted now, too. Falling apart even. (Maria Milenova, b. 1933)

The building of Izvor dam close to the town of Radomir also started with the labor of high school students from Pernik district who worked there for a month during their summer holidays, but they were no longer volunteers:

In 1958–1959 we started building the dam. We were in high school. At first we slept in the homes of the villagers; the government was paying for our food and the people took really good care of us. In the mornings we marched in ranks to the dam. Later they pitched a tent camp and we slept in the tents. The bonfires we had every evening! It was a lot of fun and we

³⁵ Migev, "Niakoi momenti," 18.

³⁶ Mikhail Anachkov, *Georgi Dimitrov i pernishkata mladezh* (Pernik: Okrîzhen komitet na Bîlgarskata komunisticheska partiia, 1982), 2.

did quite a bit of work, too. There were 330 of us from all over the district. I don't remember exactly but I think by then it was already compulsory to go on student brigades in summer. (Nacho Arsov, b. 1941)

The practice to use worker brigades and especially student brigades to help revive agriculture continued throughout the socialist period, literally until its very last years. A bulletin celebrating the thirty-fifth anniversary of the brigadier movement reports that "over 1,000,000 decares of forest in the Breznik Forestry have been created by generations of 'blue-shirt' [brigadier] young men and women, and every year thousands of them donate their labor to agriculture."³⁷ The following account makes it clear that in the 1960s the students' "work for the homeland" was no longer voluntary.

In the summer all of us high school students had to work for a couple of weeks in the village. It was almost compulsory. We knew every summer we would be somewhere on a brigade, either in agriculture or up in the hills planting forests. We had to meet targets, too. In the summer of 1964 we were on a brigade in a village near Breznik. The managers from the brigade headquarters showed up and said an international student brigade was building the road from Govedartsi to Maliovitsa but there was no one from Pernik there. So without asking, without wanting to know if we agree or not, they simply relocated us seven boys to the national brigade on Maliovitsa. There were Czechs, Poles, Swedes, Frenchmen, students from many countries. A road was being built and we uprooted the logs of felled trees. I've been to many brigades as a student and then, being a teacher, led students myself. The fall brigades were even part of the school curriculum. Everybody knew that for seven or eight days in fall the students in schools and universities will not have classes and will go on a brigade. We've harvested potatoes, picked corn, terraced land for forestation. We weren't paid for that. We all went. Nobody was forcing us but dare not go and you'd be dealing with the Komsomol leadership. They may expel you and that would be bad. What would your future look like if you've been expelled from the organization? (Zdravko Atanasov, b. 1948)

In the following decades brigadiers started being paid for their work:

I've been a brigadier and then many times brigade manager. There were both moral and material rewards for brigadiers. After the end of the brigade term we were taken on excursions along the Danube or in other cities. When the competition was reported we received prizes—books, chocolate. My brigade twice ended up being the national champion and because I was the brigade commander, I was sent on trips, first to Poland and then to the Soviet Union on the Friendship Train. We got paid, too. When we met our targets and there was surplus money, it went to the brigadiers. There were lads who joined the brigades for money. It was good being in the brigades. Fun. We had parties, bonfires every night, there were movies, visiting actors and musicians, and we used to sing brigadier marches. Years later we organized brigadier reunions. We would see friends. Friendships from the brigadier times have remained to this day. (Ivan Gyurov, b. 1969)

³⁷ "Metodicheski biuletin," *Brigadirsko liato* 81, July 1981, 2.

The memories of the generation that is now in its sixties are much less unambiguously upbeat but they still see the brigadier movement in a positive light due chiefly to the emergence of ad hoc peer communities sharing common interests (Figure 17.9.).



Figure 17.9. High school students on an agricultural brigade, 1968.

In the 1970s and the 1980s the government and the party could no longer rely on the enthusiasm or the revolutionary pathos of the youth. A streamlined organization was now in place, led by the Central Committee of the Dimitrov Communist Youth Union, district committees, and dedicated structures in brigadier headquarters. They worked exclusively for the brigadier movement. Special editions and columns in the media had as their permanent topic briga-

dier labor. There were youth programs, visiting lecturers, thematic films and theater performances, exhibitions, brigadier champion conventions, literary competitions. All these activities were backed by government agencies and institutions. A mandatory aspect of ideological work was the ceremonious ranking and awarding of labor champions. Today the badge, with its familiar inscription “We Build for Our Country,” is considered an antique and is sold at auctions as a memento of the brigadier movement and socialism (Figure 17.10.).



Figure 17.10. “We Build for Our Country”—the brigadier slogan and symbol, 1975.

During the socialist decades the first socialist labor brigades in Bulgaria were created at the mines and the many industrial enterprises established in Pernik. Their members were almost exclusively young people. The party and Komsomol structures used them to build, inculcate, and impose the same behavioral patterns that emerged decades earlier in the volunteer labor brigades. Ethnographic interviews provide a close-up of these developments:

Together with Evgeni Stefanov we were heroes of socialist labor. Both he and I were heads of socialist labor brigades at the mine. At the time our two brigades built a kindergarten with volunteer labor. The two collectives worked after hours, after we walked out of the mine. Every day seven or eight people went over after work to build the kindergarten. I was there, too. We even put up a plaque at the entrance saying this kindergarten was built by the collectives of Evgeni Stefanov and Georgi Tsvetanov, the heroes. Well, it wasn't the heroes all by themselves; it was

the brigades of the heroes. It's the kindergarten across from the hospital, up from the parking lot. It was a gift from the miners for the children of this city. When it was done, Stanko Todorov [the Speaker of the National Assembly] came there to open it. He gave us flowers and said we could build anything this way. Evgeni Stefanov's brigade indeed built a cattle farm in the village of Gırlo later on. A modern building, state-of-the-art equipment. (Georgi Iosifov, b. 1925)

The aspect of cultural memory related to socialist competitions in Bulgarian plants, enterprises, and farms during the socialist period deserves special attention and will be the topic of separate research. Our interest here concerns only some examples that partly continued the brigadier movement traditions in the following decades and their associated memories. Young people competed and made solemn promises to overshoot targets to honor the party congresses or to commemorate prominent dates in Bulgarian history:

I was the Komsomol secretary at the Metal Works. The plant had 8,000 metal workers and a large part of them were young people. I read in the *Ogoniok* magazine that youth shifts were formed in the Soviet Union. I made a proposal, the director M. Doichev agreed, and we established a "youth shift." That meant that in the entire plant, in all units and sectors, one of the shifts was a youth shift, say the third shift. There's only young people working everywhere at the same time, in all workplaces, in all units—only young people. And they all compete with each other. When the youth shift took the night shift, I didn't go home but slept at the plant. (Maria Milenova, b. 1933)

Another memory explains:

The competition at the plant was reported on a monthly basis by the units and every quarter for the entire plant. The competition was directly connected with the communist labor movement that involved 670 workers. Two brigades were distinguished with the title Communist Labor Brigade. Due to its high labor achievements the plant was declared a youth plant by decision of the Dimitrov Komsomol Central Committee and the Komsomol chapter was awarded with the ensign of the Komsomol Central Committee.³⁸

If we try to find a summary formula to characterize this later socialist period in the memories of its contemporaries—the workers in the Pernik heavy industry plants—the memory boils down to a single recurrent statement: "We worked under socialism, the whole nine yards, but there was comradeship, there was team spirit. We even built our houses all together." Clearly, and regardless of positive or negative implications, according to the respondents the main characteristic of the period, was a lot of hard work and the creation of communities that played a no small part in the life of the individual.

Until the democratic changes in Bulgaria in the last decade of the twentieth century, the memory of the first years of the brigadier movement (the construc-

³⁸ Georgi Klisarski, "Nai-hubavite mi godini," in *45 godini Zavod za tokoizpraviteli* (Pernik: Argus 2006), 31.

tion of the Pernik–Voluiak railroad and the industrial plants) lived on in the public mind because it was continuously publicized and “renewed” in the public domain by various ways and means. The memory was “enriched” with the individual memories of other young people formed during brigades that continued throughout the socialist period. Naturally, this memory has “coalesced with the groups” of its bearers. It has emerged in a specific time and will perish when its bearers also perish. When the bearers embodying a memory die, it gives way to a new memory.³⁹ This can be illustrated by two surveys carried out recently in Pernik with representatives of two generations: the generation of the 1960s and people born after 1990 during the period of democratic changes. Asked a specific question: “What are your associations when you hear the phrase “brigadier movement”? the first group of respondents gave the following answers:

My father got to Pernik–Voluiak, he signed on, went there, there was a lot of fun, but the job was grueling so he pretended he was sick in order to come home. He gave up. (V. T., b. 1958)

I’ve heard about the brigadier movement. It’s the people who’ve built Pernik–Voluiak, many plants, passes and other places. (L. S., b. 1968)

We were brigadiers in our school and student years. There was no one to work in agricultural jobs and they took us. But it was such fun, you know. (M. H., b. 1953)

That’s the school brigades, we had them, too, that was the most hilarious part of my life. (B. S., b. 1969)

We went on brigade in the villages and our parents, friends, and dates came over to see us over the weekend. (A. N., b. 1960)

I took part in Bulgaria’s brigadier movement even though I didn’t have to because I am a foreigner and foreign students didn’t go. I didn’t speak the language though and I wanted to be with lots of people to learn. So I joined a brigade in the place of a Bulgarian student who didn’t want to go. We picked tobacco somewhere near Razgrad. It was in the 1970s. During that brigade I started speaking Bulgarian. (N. Sivkov, b. 1956)

I’ve been to brigades, only people who had some illness didn’t go. I was always there. One night we tucked hot potatoes from the camp fire in the commander’s bed. We laughed our heads off. (D. H., b. 1961)

I know, it’s the brigades we went on when we were at school. I don’t know why they made us go work in the field. Someone must have been doing a poor job and we had to go do it for them. (V. V., b. 1959)

This group of interviews shows that the generation of the 1960s which was directly involved in the agricultural brigades of the late 1970s and the 1980s, had “inherited” the memory about the initial phase of the brigadier movement of the late 1940s. These people have clear, firsthand memories from the later permutations of the brigadier movement where most often the central theme is collective entertainment.

³⁹ Assman, *Kulturnata pamet*, 49.

The memories of today's seventeen year olds are somewhat different. Presented with the same question: "What are your associations when you hear the phrase "brigadier movement?" the boys and girls responded:

I don't have a clue what you're asking me about. (M. P., b. 1985)

Oh, I don't know... (B. M., b. 1988)

What's that, actually? (N. S., b. 1992)

I understand both words separately. A "brigadier" is the headman of a brigade in some plant, and "movement" is movement, when something is moving. The two words together make no sense to me, though. (B. B., b. 1992)

My mom and dad took part in some agricultural brigades, is that it? (M. G., b. 1990)

There were probably some school romps and parties in the villages and the students helped with something. (B. S., b. 1989)

In fall, before school started, they used to go pick fruit or hay in the nearby villages. That must be the brigades you're asking about. But "movement" ... I don't know. (M. N., b. 1993)

My grandfather told me they built a lot in the city. He took part in the construction of the steel plant at some point, a long time ago. (M. P., b. 1985)

Apparently, the brigadier movement that lasted for more than forty years has no place in the new cultural memory of the young people today. The people born in the late 1960s and the 1970s are the last generation whose cultural memory harbors the brigadier movement because they still were firsthand participants in its later modifications that "ensured" continuity and perpetuated that memory.⁴⁰ The generation of the 1980s snatched only fragmented memories and the young people today, born in the 1990s, know hardly anything about the brigades that took part in the construction of socialism in Bulgaria. A phenomenon that no longer finds a relevant frame of reference in the development of modern-day society has been forgotten.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 32.

18. How Post-1989 Bulgarian Society Perceives the Role of the State Security Service

Iskra Baeva

For good or bad, in the course of the last more than two decades Bulgarian society has been undergoing deep social and political transformations. These have not been the first transformations of this kind during the twentieth century but for the first time the historians of my generation could observe and analyze them by themselves. From the very beginning of the changes in Bulgaria—10 November 1989—it became quite clear to me that, apart from participating in political life (which I did throughout the first decade of the transition), I should view what was happening through the prism of the professional historical analysis. Especially significant to me was the possibility to directly observe how some “historical truths” were replaced with others. In my efforts to trace the changes in the perceptions of the past I focused on several processes: the sharp turn in the interpretation of contemporary Bulgarian history; the way in which the generation carrying out the transition to democracy was passing down its own ideas of the recent past to the next generation, which had no memories of its own of the epoch of socialism; and last but not least, how the problem of the secret services was interpreted and used during the years of transition.

Bulgaria's transition from the Soviet-type system of state socialism to parliamentary democracy and market economy was carried out in the framework of the more general process of transformations taking place in the whole of Eastern Europe from the second half of the 1980s to this day. Although after the Second World War the uniform Soviet model was imposed on all East European states, each had its own specificities due to its different historical traditions. The East European states showed similar peculiarities in the period of transition. Along with other differences, a specific feature of the Bulgarian transition was related to the condemnation of the activity of the State Security (*Dîrzhavna sigurnost*, DS) and the exposure of its collaborators, more commonly and rather imprecisely called “informers.” In Bulgaria, almost until the

end of the 1990s, society was denied access to the documentation of the DS. Only at the end of 2006 a law was passed whereby the archives of the special services were given to a specially formed commission that was assigned the task to make them public.¹

The particular Bulgarian attitude toward the DS and its documentation is a hardly coincidental blend of disgust, respect, and veneration. It stems from the historical specificities of Bulgarian socialism that reflect not so much on the interpretation of the records in principle, but rather on the people connected with the DS. In order to show the difference, I will begin with a brief survey of the attitudes toward the State Security Services and their archives in the other East European states.

The issue of the special services was raised in the German Democratic Republic after the fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989. The mass demonstrations escalated and on 15 January 1990 the State Security (Staatssicherheit or Stasi)² headquarters were seized by the infuriated crowd, but at that time the attention of Germans was focused primarily on the unification of the country. Faced with the issue of the Stasi records, the authorities in Bonn discussed the possibility of their annihilation, but under pressure from East German dissidents they gave up and started opening the files in order to “*read the whole story*.” The Stasi Records Law was passed in 1992, and an office was set up in 1993. It received the Stasi Archive (without the part that was transferred to the USA) and the right to declassify it. The Stasi Archive occupies a space of over 180 km², and its first head was the Pastor Joachim Gauck, who became president of Germany in 2012.

The term “lustration” (from the Latin *lustratio*—“purification through sacrifice”) was coined in Czechoslovakia, which started its “Velvet Revolution” (17 November 1989) a week after the beginning of the changes in Bulgaria (10 November 1989). In the postsocialist reality the term is related to the attempt to “illuminate” the past and to “protect” the future from the invisible power of the people from the former State Security Service. According to the ideologists of lustration, this could be achieved by means of cutting off the access of such people to state and public functions. In 1993 the Czech Republic (after the break-up of Czechoslovakia on 1 January 1993) adopted a “Law on the Illegal Character of the Communist Regime,” which allowed for the prosecution of activists from the period before 1989. An Office for the Documentation and the Investigation of the Crimes of Communism was established, and its first steps

¹ The Law for Access to and Disclosure of the Documents and for Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army was passed by the Fortieth National Assembly at the beginning of December 2006. See *Dîrzhaven vestnik* 102, 19 December 2006.

² Anne Worst, *Konets Stasi. Istoriia odnoi sekretnoi sluzhby* (Moscow: Vozvrashchenie, 1994).

were to bring charges against three former Communist Party leaders for their role in assisting the Warsaw Pact invasion of Czechoslovakia on 21 August 1968. After long discussions regarding the democratic nature of the approach, in 1996 the Czech Parliament passed a Law on Lustration which enabled each person who had been repressed in the period of socialism to get access to their personal record.

In 1994 the Hungarian Parliament also took the decision to impose lustration and quarantine state positions for people associated with the former State Security Service. In 1996 an Office of History was established where the records are kept.

Poland was among the first states to start discussions on the records. The agitated political fights from the socialist years had sensitized the Poles to the invisible interference of the Polish and Soviet secret services. In the summer of 1989 the first noncommunist prime minister, Tadeusz Mazowiecki, launched his thesis about the “thick line” that was to separate the new society from the old one. It meant that the divisions from the past were to remain there and everybody had to be able to start “anew.” Mazowiecki’s idea of giving a “new chance” to each Pole was countered by the activists of Solidarity who insisted on retribution.

In Romania a law for the citizens’ access to the Securitate documents that concerned them was adopted in 1999. A National Council for the Study of the Securitate Archives (CNSAS) was established and took up the entire documentation from the Romanian Information Service (RIS). After 2005 a decision was adopted for the RIS to hand over to CNSAS the whole collection of documents and every Romanian citizen was given access to the Securitate Archives.³

It is not difficult to see that the Central European states (the former GDR, the Czech Republic, Poland, and Hungary), which during the socialist period all lived through civic conflicts accompanied by considerable numbers of victims and crushed by crude outside interference, opted for a quick and explicit condemnation of the secret services and full disclosure of their archives. Their recent history deprived of legitimacy the adherents to the former system: clear evidence was the outcome of the first free and democratic elections that marginalized the successors of the ruling communist parties. This was even more valid for the secret services which had carried out repressive functions against society. The situation in the Balkans, where the socialist system yielded considerably greater popular influence, seemed much more difficult. The first pluralist elections in the region were won by the successors of the former ruling parties. This spaced out the attacks against the State Security, although in the very first days and months of the transition many voices were heard in this regard.⁴

³ An overview of the topic of the files was made by one of the few surviving analytical newspapers devoted to important cultural and social problems. See *Kultura* 15, 22 April 2005.

⁴ C. Charles Bertschi, “Lustration and the Transition to Democracy: The Cases of Poland and Bulgaria,” *East European Quarterly* 28, no. 4 (1995): 435–51.

What does the question of the “files” look like in Bulgaria? It started to agitate the Bulgarians in the very first months of the changes due to the abolishment of censorship and the emergence of numerous publications immediately after 10 November 1989 about all kinds of events that until then had been passed over in silence. The files went into circulation in the fall of 1990 when the founder of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) and first democratically elected president, Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev, accused the new UDF leader Petăr Beron of affiliation with the DS. After these charges and the statement that Zhelev held possession of his DS file, Beron was forced to resign and in December 1990 his place was taken by Philip Dimitrov.

The popular interest in the role of the DS focused on the Grand National Assembly (GNA). Suspicions were raised that DS collaborators had been elected to Parliament and impacted its work. On 5 December 1990 the GNA set up an Investigation Committee on the Files of the MPs, consisting of twenty-one MPs and chaired by Georgi Tambuev of the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), with deputy chairmen Rumen Danov and Alexander Staliiski (UDF). The task of the Investigation Committee was to find out which of the MPs in the GNA had files in the DS and what the nature of their collaboration was. Even before the setting up of the Committee fears were expressed in the GNA (by the former chief secretary of the Ministry of Interior General Todor Boiadzhiev) that its work would open Pandora’s box.

The problems started right away—three of the committee members appeared to be former collaborators of DS’s Sixth Directorate⁵ (the only one envisaged for investigation by the GNA decision, because it played the role of political police). According to the information prepared by the Ministry of Interior, twenty-eight MPs from the GNA had been connected with the Sixth Directorate, three as permanently appointed; six as acting, and nineteen as former associates. Among the former associates were Georgi Markov, Krum Nevrokopski, Boiko Kostov, Petko Ogoiski, Pirin Vodenicharov, Iosif Petrov, Ianko Iankov, and Metropolitan Pankrati (Pencho Donchev). Among the active associates were Ivan Palchev, Doncho Karakachanov, Petăr Beron, and Ivan Glushkov. Ibrahim Tatarlı was among the permanently appointed. The first surprise was that most of the collaborators came from the opposition—the UDF and the Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MFR). It also became clear from the very beginning that the archive of the Sixth Directorate was not intact, which cast doubts on the completeness of the information.

Once set in motion, the mechanism was hard to stop. The Investigation Committee started screening the personal records of the compromised MPs in

⁵ Within the 1969–1990 structure of State Security (DS), the Sixth Directorate dealt with ideological sabotage and antistate activities (the other five with intelligence, counterintelligence, military intelligence, technical/economic intelligence, and security and protection).

order to assess the nature of their cooperation. When on 22 April 1991 the committee report was ready and had to be discussed in the GNA Bureau, one of the new small-circulation newspapers (the newspaper *Fax*) published a "List of the Informers in the GNA," which outraged public opinion. Under enormous pressure on 23 April 1991 the GNA was forced to discuss the issue at an open session broadcast by Bulgarian National Radio and Bulgarian National Television. The report of the Investigation Committee was not officially adopted, and the Committee did not even manage to present the motives and the circumstances of the MPs' collaboration with the DS, neither to assess the effectiveness of their collaboration. Instead, elderly former inmates of detention camps, who were forced to sign declarations of collaboration with the DS upon being released from the camps, appeared on the GNA rostrum and spoke about the persecutions they had endured. No such confessions were made by the younger MPs, but this was obscured by the scandal and its political interpretations: the UDF representatives repeated their theses about the repressive nature of the communist regime, while the BSP emphasized the fact that almost all the informers were from the opposition.⁶

The problems related to the documentation of the DS became publicly known in 1992, when an investigation started into the circumstances around the murder of émigré writer Georgi Markov in London in 1978. The investigation revealed that on 29 January 1990 the then minister of the interior, Atanas Semerdzhiev, had approved the suggestion of the deputy minister, General Stoyan Savov, for the elimination of files.⁷

The first failed attempt to better understand the past through the files did not diminish public interest. On 10 April 1992 the first UDF government headed by Philip Dimitrov handed in a new proposal for declassifying the records of the former DS. This time it was intended not only for the MPs, but also for ministers, high government officials, and party leaders. The proposal was not put into practice because the UDF fell into an internal crisis and at the end of 1992 Philip Dimitrov's government resigned.

The issue of access to the documents of the DS was raised again when the UDF regained power (as part of the United Democratic Forces coalition) after the elections of 19 April 1997. The Law on the Access to the Former State Security Documents was voted on in Parliament on 30 July 1997.⁸ The Bulgarian Socialist Party opposed the law, but the Constitutional Court approved it and specified that only people who had personal records on file, and not those listed only in catalogue references, could be designated as DS collaborators. This

⁶ Georgi Tambuev, *Kompromat 2* (Sofia: FOO Vremeinformkomers, 1991).

⁷ Atanas Semerdzhiev, "Az si ponesokh krîsta za dosietata. Segã e red na BSP!," *Trud* 337, no. 6, December 2006.

⁸ *Dîrzhaven vestnik* 63, 6 August 1997.

again raised the issue of the incompleteness of the documentation. The Law enabled each citizen to view their personal file, but the number of Bulgarians who showed interest in their records was quite small, while many of those who handed in applications were told that there were no such files in the archive. Of great importance for the historical profession was the provision that the documentation of the former DS should be handed over to the Central State Archive within one year of the passing of the law, but this stipulation never materialized. On 22 October 1997 Interior Minister Bogomil Bonev read in Parliament the names of twenty-three high government officials who had collaborated for the DS, including fourteen MPs from all parliamentary groups. The full list comprised ninety-seven names, but the records for most of them were incomplete and were not made public.

The lack of significant sociopolitical results from the opening of the records necessitated a change of approach. On 28 February 2001 the Parliament set up two commissions to deal with the files. The first one (called the “Andreev Commission,” after its chairman) consisted of seven members: five elected by Parliament, and two chosen by the government. It was nominated for a five-year period and had the task of examining and disclosing the collaborators of the communist secret services who after 1989 had occupied or were currently occupying a “certain public position,” and had been engaged or were currently engaged in a “certain public activity.” The second commission consisted of five judges and public prosecutors; it was to inspect the conclusions of the first commission and to give approval for making the findings public. The first commission started publishing secret service documents of public interest, but managed to publish only one volume in 2002.⁹ One of the first conclusions reached by the Commission on State Security Records was that collaborators for the DS were found in all Bulgarian governments after 1989.

On 21 May 2001, days before the parliamentary elections of 17 June 2001, the Commission on the Records announced that fifty-two MPs in the national assemblies during the transition period had been permanently or temporarily appointed associates to the State Security or to the General Staff Intelligence Service. In the raging preelection campaign the records were again used as a political weapon: all MP candidates were subject to preliminary screening. New lists appeared, heating up the debate on the cooperation with the DS and the intelligence services: which activities were in the interest of the state, and which ones were to be classified as political slander? As a result of the screening, alleged collaborators with the former DS were removed from the election tickets of the UDF and the National Movement Simeon II (NMSS), while the MRF and the BSP ignored the disclosures.¹⁰

⁹ “Da se zapazi za vechni vremena,” *Informatsionen biuletin* 1–2 (2002).

¹⁰ *Sega*, 20 October 2004.

The new NMSS government changed the attitude toward the records. Acting on the government's proposal, on 18 April 2002 the Parliament suspended the Law on the Access to the Archives of the Former State Security and discontinued the Andreev Commission, adopting on the following day the Law on Classified Information. The new law was not intended to examine the past, but was made in accordance with the requirements for the protection of information introduced in the process of Bulgaria's accession to NATO.

Bulgaria did not stay away from lustration. After the UDF won the elections in October 1991, there were calls for imposing legal restrictions on people that had held high-ranking posts until 1989. The Philip Dimitrov government suggested provisions to be included in the new structural laws regulating different public spheres that forbid former political and state activists from holding leading positions. Such a lustration text banning people from the former *nomenklatura* from employment in high posts for a period of five years was included as § nine in the transitory and final provisions of the Law on Banks and Credit Activity adopted in 1992. President Zhelev declared himself against the UDF's proposal to prohibit a large number of people associated with the previous system from taking part in the management of companies with state participation of up to 30% of the assets. These included DS agents, secretaries of Primary Party Organizations (PPOs), apparatchiks of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (CC of BCP), the Fatherland Front, Dimitrov Communist Youth Union (DCYU), the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, and the graduates of the KGB schools in the USSR. Zhelev backed his view with the argument: "National reconciliation and the success of the economic reform are for me the real decommunization."¹¹

The single lustration law that was adopted by the 36th National Assembly dealt with research and science. In December 1992, on the suggestion of the UDF MP Georgi Panev, a professor of physics at St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia/Sofia University, a Law on the Temporary Introduction of Additional Requirements for Members of the Executive Bodies of the Scientific Or-

¹¹ In 1992 the President Zhelyo Zhelev declared himself against the Decommunization Bill of the UDF. At that time he was already in conflict with the Prime Minister Philip Dimitrov. The Bill envisaged that certain categories should not be allowed to hold leading positions in the executive of enterprises with more than 30% state participation, state media and organizations, maintained by the state budget. These categories included cadres and agents of the State Security; secretaries of the BCP basic organizations; cadres of the so called "nomenclature" in the Central Committee of the Communist Party, the People's Front, the Communist Youth Organization and the Agrarian Union; participants in the "Revival Process"; professors at the Academy of Social Sciences and Social Government, the schools of the Central Committee of BCP and those of the Communist Party of the USSR, as well as at KGB training schools. At that time Zhelev declared: "National reconciliation and the success of the economic reform are for me the real decommunization." Quoted from <http://www.decommunization.org/Articles/Hristov4.htm>.

ganizations and the Higher Certifying Commission (the “Panev Law”) was adopted. This law banned former members of the Politburo, the Secretariat of the CC of BCP, the *nomenklatura* of the CC of BCP, permanently appointed and volunteer associates of the DS and the Security and Protection Directorate (SPD), participants in the “revival process,” cadres of the Academy of Social Sciences and Economic Management (ASSEM), of the Higher Party School, of the Institute of History of the Bulgarian Communist Party, and the KGB and DS schools, professors of the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and of the BCP, of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, scientific communism, and party building, as well as political officers and PPO secretaries to hold leading research positions for a period of five years.¹² The discriminatory nature of the “Panev Law” provoked a strong public reaction, for it was very difficult to establish the harms inflicted on science by the people that were removed. This played a role in the cardinal change in the attitude of the Bulgarians who voted the BSP back into power in the December 1994 elections.

Unlike in the countries of Central Europe, in Bulgaria the attempt to condemn the past with the help of disclosures associated with the activity of the former DS or through temporary administrative restrictions for activists of the pre-1989 regime was not successful. The main reason was that the system which existed until 1989 was regarded as having undeniable criminal characteristics only by a very small part of the Bulgarians. According to the greater part of the society, the regime had imposed restrictions on political and economic freedoms, but in exchange had provided social and economic security. The interest toward the records was preserved among the intellectuals, for they wanted to know who was who in the past and what hidden mechanisms pulled the strings behind the decisions in the cultural sphere. The vigorous roundtable discussion “The State Security Records in the Bulgarian Culture” held on 16 July 2001 is evidence for such interest.¹³

Regardless of these attitudes, in 2006 the need to open the archives of the former DS and military intelligence was set as a preliminary condition for Bulgaria’s accession to the EU. On 5 June 2006 the Council of the Tripartite Coalition (BSP, NMSS, and MRF) announced its intention to disclose all the former DS files. By the end of the year the law was passed, but again the process was accompanied by numerous scandals.¹⁴ Public disclosures turned up the records of journalist Georgi Koritarov,¹⁵ politicians Petăr Beron, Yunal Lutfi, Krasimir

¹² *Dirzhaven vestnik* 104, 24 December 1992, 62.

¹³ Plamen Doynov, “Tri literaturni diskusii. Dosietata na Dirzhavna sigurnost v bilgarskata kultura. Literaturni stranitsi i literaturni svetove,” *Literaturen pregled* 2000–2001 (Sofia: Akademichen tsentŕ za literatura i kultura, 2002).

¹⁴ *Novinar* 281, 30 November 2006.

¹⁵ Diana Kŕncheva, “Nova TV: Vsichki obichat Koritarov. Toi Az sŕm Ratko Mladić. Zriteli i kolegi v zashtita na zhurnalista,” *24 chasa* 142, 25 May 2006, 13; G. Koritarov, “Koritarov si

Karakachanov, Chief Mufti Mustafa Alish Hadzhi, and President Georgi Pîrvanov.¹⁶ The process of setting up the Commission that was to control the work on the records was not easier.¹⁷

The public discussion on the role and place of the DS was renewed after the so called “Files Commission” began its actual work and started revealing public figures’ affiliation with the DS. The discussion, however, failed to address a number of pertinent questions: what was the actual public role of the special services in the socialist period; was the former DS involved in organized and purposeful activity in the transition period; the moral aspects of the affiliation with the DS, and the personal responsibility for collaboration and for the committed deeds. The debate focused only on whether or not the DS and its members should be condemned collectively.

prizna i se izvini. Agentî: Mislekh, che pomagam na Bîlgaria,” *Standart* 4807, 27 May 2006, 15; G. Koritarov, “Koritarov v nai-tezhkoto predavane v efir prez zhivota si. Vsichki vie, chiito sîdbi sîm promenil—izviniavaite!,” *24 chasa* 144, 27 May 2006, 15.

¹⁶ The public was naturally excited first and foremost by the disclosure of the incumbent president Georgi Pîrvanov as an agent of the DS, which caused widespread discussions. Veselin Angelov, “Pîrvanov ne e bil agent, nito e znael, che DS go probva,” *24 chasa* 165, 17 June 2006, 15; “Georgi Pîrvanov: Kostov lîzhe ili e podveden,” *Trud* 176, 28 June 2006, 9; Liliia Tsacheva, “Kostov se otmegna, che desni sa opaskali dosieto Gotse,” *Trud* 176, 28 June 2006, 10; Kircho Kirov, “Papkata za prezidenta Pîrvanov e tînka,” *Trud* 177, 29 June 2006, 9; Dimo Giaurov, “Nisto ne e makhnato ot papka Gotse,” *Standart* 4840, 29 June 2006, 8; “Ofitserî na Gotse izleze na svetlo. Gavriat se s prezidenta, negoduva BSP. Kostov: Sdelka? Pitaite Stoianov. Kra-simir Premianov: Niama sdelka mezhdu Pîrvanov i Kostov. Skandalît okolo prezidenta shte mu navredi na izborite,” *Standart* 4842, 1 July 2006, 9; Tsviatko Tsvetkov, “Pîrvanov ne e bil agent, a ‘nai-dobriiat istorik,’” *Trud* 179, 1 July 2006, 15; Lyuben Obretenov, “‘Gotse’ udari slabo doverieto v Pîrvanov,” *Sega*, 21 July 2006, 9; Kraismir Raidovski, “Bivsh razuznavach. Niakoi iska da destabilizira obstanovkata okolo prezidenta,” *Monitor*, 22 December 2006, 21; Iasen Lyutskanov, “Prezidentî sam pusna papka ‘Gotse’ v internet. V komisiyata po dosietata sporiat znael li e Georgi Pîrvanov, che raboti za DS,” *Sega* 168, 20 July 2007, 9; “‘Slaveiche’ i ‘Diplomat’ peeli v prezidentstvoto. Komisiyata po dosietata ofitsialno obiavi dîrzhavnîa glava za agent ‘Gotse,’” *Monitor*, 20 July 2007, 21; Petio Tsekov, “‘SS Gotse.’ Vliiae li minaloto na mladiia istorik Pîrvanov vîrkhu nastoiasheteto na dîrzhavnîia glava?,” *Sega* 167, 21 July 2007, 9; Iasen Lyutskanov, “Dosietata se ‘pipat’ predi komisiyata. 36 lista ot papka ‘Gotse’ lipsvat, razuznavaneto mîlchi. Fakti i vîprosi okolo papka ‘Gotse,’” *Sega* 167, 21 July 2007, 10; General Bogomil Bonev, “Kostov vidia papkata ‘Gotse’ prez 1997 i sîshto pretseni, che Pîrvanov ne e agent na DS. Ofitserî Tsvetkov e predstavil fiktivna verbovka za deistvitelna,” *24 chasa* 199, 23 July 2007, 15; Panaiot Angarev, “Shefit na razuznavaneto shte dade obiasneniia za papkata ‘Gotse,’” *Dnevnik* 141, 23 July 2007; Plamen Bogoev, “Gotse—chast ot aferata ‘Komita.’ Shesto odobri Pîrvanov za sekretna rabota,” *168 chasa* 30, 27 July–2 August 2007, 11; Velislava Dîreva, “Papkata ‘Gotse’ otvîrna na ‘priatelskia ogîn,” *24 chasa* 221, 14 August 2007, 21; Tatiana Doncheva, “Triabvashe da reagira predi godina, a ne sega,” *24 chasa* 221, 14 August 2007, 22.

¹⁷ Mostly because the UDF candidate Georgi Konstantinov, an anarchist communist and fighter against the system, was denied access to the commission (Kalina Vlaikova, “Ekzekutorî na Stalin,” *24 chasa* 65, 8 March 2007, 25).

The way the secret services were portrayed in films played a significant role in how Bulgarian society perceived them during the transition period. The film *O, Gospodi, kîde si?* (Oh, God, where are you?) dedicated to the DS, by director and screenwriter Krasimir Krumov, appeared in 1991, at the beginning of the transition. It depicted the DS as a morally destructive organization: the protagonist was a rebellious member of the political police who organized a revenge group, but instead of achieving justice, he fell into the vicious circle of violence. The message of the film may well have been to illustrate that revenge is pointless, but the most memorable image remained the slogan written on the wall of a prison from the early 1950s: “DS—the ear, eye, and fist of the party.” Krumov’s film bore the distinctive traits of Bulgarian cinema: a proclivity for declarations, no sense of humor, and lack of logic in the actions of the protagonists. It could not rival in influence either *Na vsaki kilometr* (At every kilometer), the most successful Bulgarian series from the socialist period, whose second part glorified the DS, nor similar movies from other former socialist states, such as the Serbian *The Professional* (2002) by Dushan Kovačević and the German *The Life of Others* (2006) by Henckel von Donnersmarck, whose goal was to demystify the respective security services.

The Files Commission, created in spring 2007, encountered many problems right from the beginning, chiefly due to legal restrictions. The law was very clear about those who should be checked for connections and affiliation with the DS. They should be Bulgarian citizens “occupying public positions or engaged in public activities.”¹⁸

People engaged in the following thirteen public activities were also to be checked: directors of media and sociological, advertising, PR agencies, of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences (BAS) and its institutes, of state and private universities, high schools, hospitals, medical establishments, doctors’ organizations, political parties, unions, economic and noneconomic organizations, religious

¹⁸ Law for Access to and Disclosure of Documents, article 1, paragraph 2. It listed 29 categories of public service: the president, the vice president, members of the National Assembly and the European Parliament, members of the Council of Ministers and of the ministers’ political cabinets, judges from the Constitutional Court, the ombudsman, chairs and vice chairs of state agencies and commissions, members of the High Judicial Council, the governing bodies of the Commission for Protection of the Competition, the Communication Regulatory Commission, the Bulgarian National Bank (BNB), the Chamber of Accounts, the National Pension Institute, the National Health Office, the agencies and institutions created by the Council of Ministers, the Privatization and Postprivatization Control Agencies, the Ministry of the Interior, the General Staff and the Headquarters of the armed forces, the National Intelligence and Security Service, regional governors and their assistants, mayors, vice mayors and advisors, members of the Electronic Media Council, the governing bodies of the Bulgarian National Television (BNT), the Bulgarian National Radio (BNR), the Central Electoral Commission, the National Center for Research of the Public Opinion, the diplomatic missions, the administration of the President, members of the High Attestation Commission (which granted research degrees), and Bulgarian representatives in international organizations (ibid., article 3, paragraph 1, 1–29).

communities, the Lawyers Union, the High Lawyers Council, the High Supervising Council, the High Disciplinary Court, the national sports organizations, the Bulgarian Olympic Committee, banks, insurance and shareholder companies, gambling games, long-range communication operators, radio and TV operators, and receivers.¹⁹

The thorough and very comprehensive list of positions that should be checked for connections to the DS shows how hard it was to determine the important public spheres where possible DS influence could harm democratic changes. This approach illustrates that the law was not concerned with getting a better picture of the past, but instead tried to resolve problems with the transition. The first problem was that the “illumination” of the DS past concerned only some Bulgarians, causing feelings of inequity and suspicions that part of the truth remains hidden. The second problem was related to the identical approach to all forms of collaboration with the DS. The name of everyone “who has been involved as a permanent or temporary associate or had affiliation with the service,” has to be revealed.²⁰ This followed the notion of the “evil nature” of the DS and made no distinction between permanent associates, voluntarily collaborators, and those who were forced to collaborate. The most consistent proponent of this view was the right-wing party Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB).²¹ Public opinion also shared this view, in part because the media started calling an “informer” everyone connected to the DS. The role of the DS was thus reduced only to gathering internal political information from and on the citizens. On the other hand, the attacks against everyone disclosed seemed less convincing, because the lists contained the names of many military officers who had gained popularity at the beginning of the transition: Gen. Atanas Semerdzhiev (vice president), Gen. Todor Boiadzhiev (member of the GNA and general secretary of the Ministry of the Interior), Gen. Brigo Asparukhov (MP), Gen. Lyuben Gotsev (MP, deputy minister of the Interior and minister of foreign affairs), and Gen. Lyuben Marinchevski (MP).²²

According to some politicians and part of the public, the third problem in the law was the lack of lustration texts.²³ The desire for lustration is based on the

¹⁹ Ibid., 1–13.

²⁰ Ibid., chapter 3, section 1, bl. 24.

²¹ According to Atanas Atanasov, DSB deputy and a former general, “there is no difference between intelligence officers and ‘informers’ because everyone’s work was used by the secret services.” See Atanas Atanasov, “Files, Files ...,” *Focus Agency*, 11 August 2007, <http://www.focus-news.net/?id=s1560>.

²² Commission for Disclosure of the Documents and for Announcing the Affiliation of Bulgarian Citizens to the State Security and the Intelligence Services of the Bulgarian National Army, *Bulletin* 1, 5 April 2007–29 February 2008, Decision No. 7 of 19 July 2007, Decision No. 14 of 4 September 2007, Decision No. 25 of 12 February 2008, 316–18.

²³ This demand came from the right-wing parties UDF and DSB. One of the law’s proponents explained the lack of lustration with the wish to pass the law without “saying what is good and what is bad.” See Kasim Dal, “Minalo ne se kupuva, oshte po-malko—sivest,” *Trud*, 21 June 2007, 14.

idea of social justice and revenge.²⁴ DS collaborators were to be removed and suspended from the public offices they held for five years. Coming, however, only in the seventeenth year of the transition, this ban concerned only retirees. The thrust of the discussion reflected purely political considerations: the division line was once again the attitude toward the socialist period.

The Files Commission started revealing the names of the DS collaborators in the spring of 2007. This triggered a wider public discussion. The media covered most eagerly the names of the candidates for members of the European Parliament, mayors, and municipal councilors accused of DS affiliation. The first report was released on 24 April 2007 and the media fallout shaped the response to the ensuing reports, as well as the public attitude toward the DS. All of this is well documented in publications and statements by journalists, politicians, public figures, as well as in the semi-anonymous comments at Internet forums. The “victims,” whose names were revealed by the commission, were given the floor to express their point of view, make confessions, or try to justify their actions. It is hard to estimate how much these different statements influenced public opinion, but the media were instrumental in this as in most aspects of “remembering communism.”

What is the public attitude toward “the DS files”? Just before the law was voted, an express sociological survey carried out by “Alfa-Research” (1–5 December 2006) among adult citizens of Sofia showed that 38% were against disclosure, and 54% disagreed that keeping the files secret was important for national security.²⁵ A little earlier, at the end of May 2006, a similar survey showed that 49% of the big city residents were interested in the topic, whereas 40% were indifferent. As for the attitudes toward DS collaborators 38% considered that they should be stigmatized, 33% disagreed, and 20% were indifferent.²⁶ Having in mind that both surveys focused on big cities, apparently the interest in the topic after seventeen years of transition was already limited, and the attitude toward the “informers” was not unanimously negative like the law’s proponents presumed.

The confessions of the exposed DS collaborators offered different forms of denial and failed to bring about public penitence. A good example was the interview with Ivan Ivanov, who was removed from the NMSS list of candidates for the European Parliament. He came from the Roma minority and explained the presence of his name in the DS archives with his disagreement with the so-called “revival process,” making himself a “victim.”²⁷ The popular sociology

²⁴ According to Krum Blagov, as early as 1997 “the idea of a moral catharsis was buried forever” (“Zashto liderit na SDS podade ostavka, a prezidentit beshe preizbran,” <http://www.bghelsinki.org/index.php?module=pages&lg=bg&page=obektiv14504>).

²⁵ Genoveva Petrova, “Tumorit ‘dosieta,’” *Kapital* 49, 8 December 2006, 16.

²⁶ *24 chasa* 146, 29 May 2006.

²⁷ Ivan Ivanov, “Kartoncheto mi ot DS mozhe da e za ‘Vreme razdelno,’” *24 chasa* 115, 28 April 2007, 15.

professor Georgi Fotev excused himself with the following words: “I have had an organic repulsion toward physical work ever since I was born. The only thing I can do is to write.”²⁸

Another significant statement was that of Prof. Dimo Dimov, a well-known musician and founder of the Dimov String Quartet, whose popularity spans four decades:

Unfortunately, the narrow-minded politicians produced this law on the files, which stigmatized me with the disgraceful label “agent.” This stigma cannot be washed away, it destroys mercilessly all my lifetime achievements. I know that I cannot do anything other than shout: “Yes? I was an agent of my homeland in the whole world, spreading the achievements of Bulgarian art.”²⁹

This revived the general negative reaction against the decision to make the files public. The right-wing MP Lyuben Dilov, Jr., reminded the Parliament of his proposal to destroy the files.³⁰ The position of the socialist Prime Minister Sergei Stanishev was firm:

Bulgaria is in the twenty-first century and the society has much more interesting and important topics of discussion than the opening of the DS archives—for example, how to progress. Is there a normal person outside the political sphere, who is interested in the subject of the files? To reveal the documents of the secret services is much more important for the historians and for taking away the cards from those people who abused them for blackmail.³¹

On the surface, his words reflected the traditional political platform of the BSP as a successor of the Bulgarian Communist Party, but in reality this concept corresponded with the views of an increasing number of Bulgarians, as evidenced from these two opinions from the Internet forum of the right-wing newspaper *Dnevnik*, published on 17 June 2008:

The cynical digging into the past is part of today’s ideology of the people in power and of the opposition. This past was meaningful for those of us who lived before 1989, until the middle of the 1990s. Now digging the past is pure pornography.

Stop digging bones and raising skeletons, if you want us to stay in this damn country—give the Bulgarian some reasons for self-respect.

At the beginning of 2008 further disclosures brought up the names of DS collaborators who were members of the Council of Ministers during the transition.

²⁸ Georgi Fotev, “Gospodarkata na zhivota i smîrtta e poluzhiva. Moiat sluchai e zashemetiavasht triumph na DS,” *Trud* 49, 19 February 2008, 14.

²⁹ Quote from Lyuben Dilov, Jr., “‘Istinata shte ni napravi svobodni!’ Komentar kîm edno iziavlennie,” *Novinar*, 10 September 2007, 23.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sergei Stanishev. “Koi normalen chovek izvîn politicheskite sredi go vîlnuva temata za dosietata?” *24 chasa* 244, 6 September 2007.

Most of them were known even before, but for the first time the list included a large number of diplomats who contributed to the intelligence service. One of the founders of UDF and a former minister of foreign affairs, Solomon Pasi, commented:

Between 70% and 90% of our best diplomats before 10 November 1989 were engaged with the national intelligence service. Obviously, people with qualities were involved with the intelligence service. Ambassador Lyubomir Ivanov was Bulgaria's chief negotiator with NATO; he was the chief negotiator for the American military bases in Bulgaria; he was my personal deputy for the OSCE and is at the moment one of the three or four most influential ambassadors in the Council of NATO. The fact that his name is present in these files should not affect in any way his career. I would like to say the best for my predecessor Stanislav Daskalov. From this list, it becomes clear that he was affiliated with the Bulgarian intelligence. Ambassador Boiko Mirchev is also in this list. These diplomats carried out the negotiations for EU membership and I believe they deserve enormous respect.³²

In other words, the European and NATO integration of Bulgaria was carried out by former intelligence service agents and the foreign partners were undisturbed. For that reason minister Pasi came to the conclusion that "digging in the past from forty years ago does not help the future of this country."³³

The right-wing parties (DSB, UDF, and other smaller parties) and some civil formations, such as the Union of Repressed People, strongly opposed these views.³⁴ The expectations that the public interest would be aroused by revealing a larger part of the truth about the DS, however, did not materialize. A survey by the National Center for Research of the Public Opinion, affiliated with the National Assembly, showed that in the fall of 2007, 72% of Bulgarians had lost interest in the "informers." The remaining 28% were mostly male citizens of Sofia between fifty and sixty years of age, usually supporters of the right-wing parties.³⁵ The topic is still valid only for those whose personal past relates to it.

³² Solomon Pasi, "Mezhdu diplomatsiiata i razuznavaneto ima mnogo tinka granitsa," *Focus Agency*, 14 February 2008, www.segabg.com/article.php?id=357468.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ In a declaration on 20 July 2007, DSB stated that: "State Security (DS) was formally disbanded in the very beginning of the Transition period, but it still went on existing. Leading officers of its structures preserved their serious influence in the ex-Communist party that changed its name to Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP). They gave birth to the organized criminality and the "gray economy." The people of the DS dealt a blow to our democracy and transition, stashed the money of the Bulgarians in the grey economy and the criminal sector and condemned the people to poverty. Because of them, Bulgaria is today the poorest country in Europe. During the Transition period DS still owed its own means of influence and the result was that key positions in state government were assigned to people, dependant on DS, who had to serve the purposes of the newly-born oligarchy. Through the agent, named "Gotze," the post of the President was reduced to submission and put under control... All these facts cast blight over the image of contemporary Bulgaria and make her future quite uncertain," see <http://www.dsb.bg>.

³⁵ "Bulgarians Not Interested in the Files, the Citizens of Sofia—Slightly More Interested. 72% of the People Are Not Interested in the Disclosures of the Files Commission," 3 October 2007, <http://www.zagrada.bg/show.php?storyid=382751&p=0>.

The interest in the files increased with the new batch of names in the middle of 2008, but mostly because the list included two of the most popular Bulgarian writers who actively supported the UDF, Vera Mutaſchieva, and Georgi Danailov. Confined to her room for health reasons, Vera Mutaſchieva declined any comments and just said: "I don't give a damn."³⁶ Georgi Danailov, who lived in the village of Kovachevitsa, sent an e-mail: "Revealing my name is equal to an attempted intellectual murder."³⁷ The addition of the intellectual viewpoint to the political judgment led to new criticism, not toward the accused writers, but against the law. The poet Rumen Leonidov expressed regret that "some intellectuals were not lucky to have died earlier, so that they would not be disgraced now."³⁸ The critic Ivan Granitski even called the law "cretenoid" and accused the Commission of dealing with "disinformation."³⁹ Some of the founders of the UDF also regretted the wide use of the topic of the "informers." Alexander Iordanov, leader of the Radical Democratic Party, chair of the parliamentary group of the UDF and of the 36th National Assembly, recalled that: "In those years the suspicions over who had been a DS agent undermined the relations inside the UDF. Insults and personal attacks were not uncommon."⁴⁰ This critical approach was typical for the UDF founders that were already outside politics, but not for those that remained active. This difference illustrated the topic's narrow political dimensions.

In order to get a perspective on the DS by Bulgarians without personal memories from the socialist period, between January and May 2008 we carried out a survey with seventy-two students from three disciplines at Sofia University (history, international relations, and public relations). The results showed not only that most of the students were not interested in the topic, but also that they often did not understand how the DS had functioned. Only twenty-seven students (37.5%) defined the DS as a repression force. Another twenty-two (30.5%) regarded it as a necessary element of the defense mechanisms of every society, comparing it to new realities typical for the transition, like *Big Brother* (the TV show, not the figure in George Orwell's *1984*) or a "guard dog." Others saw it as a "strange and useless matter, which is overused in electoral campaigns," or connected it only to the "files' scandal" and the process of "bringing dishonor on the new GREAT Bulgarians." A group of fifteen students (20.7%) considered the DS to have been a necessary organization for the protection of national interests.

³⁶ "Vera Mutaſchieva bila agent. Tia otseche: Pet pari ne davam," *Trud* 159, 11 June 2008.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ A statement made on BNT's political show "Panorama" on 13 June 2008.

³⁹ Granitski said this on BTV's morning show "This morning," on 11 June 2008.

⁴⁰ Alexandſir Iordanov, "Izviniavam se na Ludzhev, che go obizhdakh na agent," *Trud* 190, 12 July 2008, 14.

The data from the survey conducted among young Bulgarians, whose views on state socialism have been formed only by family, school, or media, is alarming. The attempt to use the topic of the DS in order to arouse the interest of the postsocialist Bulgarian society toward the repressive system of socialism has clearly failed. Partly responsible is the family background: the students with positive attitudes toward the DS confess that they come from families related to socialism or the DS. The real blame falls, however, on the historians, who let the politicians gain command of the topic and use it as a weapon in their political struggles. This prevented a public catharsis and subjected the DS debate and its archives to political conjuncture, which doomed it to growing public indifference.

What general conclusion could be made from the actions taken in the former socialist states of Eastern Europe on their parting with the secret past? Throughout the entire transition period, my personal stand was always against “the game with the records” (as I define the selective disclosure of DS documents.)⁴¹ I was motivated by the desire to warn about the possible public disappointment and the negative moral and ethical consequences the files might have. The disclosure of the records does not help any society’s dignified parting with the past. The records provoke disputes, personal tragedies, and confessions.⁴² The political goals—to condemn the former communists and to support the new democratic forces based on the dissident movement—were not fulfilled either. It appeared that a significant number among the new anticommunist formations had collaborated, voluntarily or not, with the secret services from the past. The idea that the disclosure of the truth about the former DS would help Bulgarians overcome socialism by assessing it as a criminal system also fell through. The outcome was negligent, just as with the destruction of the Mausoleum of Georgi Dimitrov in 1999.

Revealing the crimes of the past, destroying its symbols, and breaking down the popular influence of socialism failed for various reasons. Most important was the misguided belief that past reality could be overcome merely by imposing new symbols and a virtual reality. The anticommunists believed that the destruction of past symbols and the virtual condemnation of the system would be enough to make people forget their own past. This proved unsuccessful since people live in a real world that reminds them constantly of how they used to live, what has been built, the opportunities and restrictions of that past, even their painful encounters with the DS, but in real terms, not in the abstract form of “crimes against humanity.” Equally, the arguments of the DSB against the

⁴¹ Iskra Baeva, “Za dosietata, morala i istoriata,” *Duma* 156, 9 July 1992, 11. Iskra Baeva, “Imame li dirzhava vsishtnost?,” *Duma* 151, 2 July 1997, 13; Iskra Baeva, “Nepoliticheskoto chetivno za dosietata,” *Duma* 286, 6 December 2006, 15.

⁴² G. Koritarov, “Izpovedta na Georgi Koritarov,” *24 chasa* 144, 27 May 2006, 23.

thesis that the former security services served national interests, on the ground that the socialist state had nothing to do with the present democratic state, were unconvincing. They thoroughly neglected issues of continuity and state sovereignty.

There is also the issue of people who had not become “collaborators” and have no records simply because they were never offered the opportunity, and not because they courageously refused. Others with records have hardly committed anything reprehensible, while many people without records have harmed others. In other words, the simplified dichotomy between people with records as immoral and the ones without records as being of a high moral standard is vastly simplifying the obvious truth that moral integrity is a process that has to be constantly proved in different circumstances.

19. The Afterlife of the Securitate: On Moral Correctness in Postcommunist Romania

Cristina Petrescu

The Securitate is one “thing past” that everyone over the age of thirty in Romania remembers with horror. An accidental conversation—still vivid in my memory after more than twenty years—left me with the idea that this institution was once rather ambiguously perceived. In the fall of 1989, I was talking to a colleague at my new job and to my surprise, she started suddenly to confess to me serenely that her husband-to-be, a high school graduate, was approached by a secret police officer, who praised him for his good school record. I remember, as it struck me then, that the officer seemed to appreciate in particular his excellent performance in Romanian history. My colleague proceeded to tell me that the officer proposed to her future husband to join the Securitate, the institution meant to defend the order in “our socialist country.” Still in shock after such a confession, I dared to ask what he ended up doing, expecting her to disclose the ingenious way in which he managed to refuse the offer and escape the disgrace of signing “the pact with the devil.” Instead, my colleague simply replied that he had accepted the offer. There was no trace of embarrassment, remorse, or shame in her voice. It then dawned on me that this conversation, which I had mistakenly taken for confession of a hidden secret, was for her a very trivial one: she was only informing me about her unexpectedly good future prospects. After all, as she put it, a state-sponsored apartment with a very low rent and a better-paid job were more than welcome for a young couple about to marry. I commented nothing, but then I realized for the first time that among the people with whom I interacted on a daily basis, there was at least one person alien to the way of thinking in which I was socialized in my family, and which I had taken as commonly shared by everyone around. For me, the secret police was the “armed arm of the party,” that mysterious institution from which one had to stay away at all costs. For her, it was an avenue toward a better life, an institution capable to guarantee material and professional success. What united both viewpoints, however, was the firm belief that in Romania the Securitate

was above everyone. As a student of communism, my own view was subsequently nuanced, but the vast majority of Romanians—envisaging themselves victims of the former regime—continue to reproduce it to this day. In an attempt to distance myself from my own past and memories, I deconstruct below the ways in which Romanians remember the Securitate.

Throughout the former Soviet bloc, the institutions that once embodied the repressive nature of communist regimes still provoke memories in these societies. It was the impulse to rescue from oblivion the human rights violations committed in the name of a better future that generated alternative forms of remembering. Such counter-memory also represented a way of resisting the totalitarian ambitions of these dictatorships. “The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting” was how Milan Kundera formulated the credo of his generation of critical intellectuals, credited for having contributed toward putting an end to communism in Europe.¹ Indeed, even before 1989, many victims bore witness to injustices and atrocities endured under regimes that promised to build a just and humane world, but never admitted how these goals had been enforced. These recollections shocked people all over the world and turned the acronym Gulag, in the wake of Alexander Solzhenitsyn’s book, into an epitome of the crimes committed by communist regimes throughout the Soviet bloc. While the Gulag was the prototype for all networks of penitentiaries established after the Second World War in Eastern Europe, the KGB provided a model for secret police institutions. The Romanian Securitate was not as well known as its Soviet model or its East German equivalent, the Stasi, both of which aroused interest not only among students of communism, but also among fiction writers or film directors. However, the Securitate held third place in the hierarchy of such (in)famous institutions, as its disrepute trespassed national borders and even gave rise to a new entry in English dictionaries.² Ironically, its international ill fame did not stem from the terror applied under Romania’s first communist dictator, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, but from the systematic violation of human rights under his successor, Nicolae Ceaușescu.³

In present-day Romania, the former secret police plays a prominent role in public representations of the recent past, and in the autobiographical recollec-

¹ Milan Kundera, *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting* (London: Faber & Faber, 1996), 4.

² As illustrated by the very title of the volume: Dennis Deletant, *Ceaușescu and the Securitate: Coercion and Dissent in Romania, 1965–1989* (London: Hurst & Company, 1995).

³ A high-ranking Securitate officer under Ceaușescu who defected to the USA wrote the first book that made this institution and its abusive methods internationally famous. The book showed the Romanian secret police as a criminal organization and argued that it acted under the direct orders of the secretary general of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), Nicolae Ceaușescu. Ion Pacepa, *Red Horizons: Inside the Romanian Secret Service—The Memoirs of Ceaușescu’s Spy Chief* (London: William Heinemann, 1988).

tions of people who, directly or indirectly, came into contact with it. Public representations convey the idea that it was directly responsible for the sufferings inflicted upon innocent Romanians, and thus epitomizes the traumatic relation with communism. A consistent number of testimonies support this view, while an event like the awarding of the Nobel Prize to the Romanian-born German writer Herta Müller legitimated the drive to make the traumatic memories of the Securitate a cornerstone of communist remembrance. Many Romanians consider such an attitude crucial for the building of future democracy. At the same time, those who experienced communism have different perceptions of the former secret police, so that their autobiographical recollections sometimes contradict each other. The Securitate triggers the memory of the everyday fear that “they” imposed upon “us” and effectively inhibits the nostalgia for that past.⁴ As in Germany, where one could not joke publicly about the Stasi,⁵ Romanians associate the Securitate with painful recollections, which inspire either pious thoughts of victims or arouse indignation against the perpetrators. The Securitate is also remembered as simply another cogwheel in the system. Such memories do not represent the mainstream, but are mostly nurtured by “them,” individuals who worked for or collaborated with the Securitate, though their arguments have gained ground lately. According to them, those who served the Securitate should be judged no more harshly than the rest who tried to make a better living in the conditions imposed by communism, especially since many informants proved to be outstanding personalities in their fields. As recollections (to say nothing of the Securitate files) represent only fragments of truth or biased thoughts that are useless if not harmful to the process of democratic consolidation, some supported the idea that it is more appropriate to forget the Securitate and its collaborators rather than to obsess about them.

By mapping the diverse memories related to this institution of the former regime, this essay underlines the fact that ambiguities characteristic of the process

⁴ As Pastor Joachim Gauck, first federal commissioner for the Stasi archives and current president of Germany, put it, the content of the Stasi files represents a medicine against nostalgia. Quoted in Barbara Miller, *Narratives of Guilt and Compliance in Unified Germany: Stasi Informers and Their Impact on Society* (London: Routledge, 1999), 140.

⁵ The reactions to the opening of the Zur Firma pub on Normannenstrasse, near the former Stasi headquarters in East Berlin, indicates that any attempts to dedramatize the memory of such institutions inevitably conflicts with the painful recollections of the victims. Philipp Wittrock, “Stasi-Kneipe in Berlin: Ein Bier zum Verhör,” *Spiegel Online*, 4 August 2008, <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,569777,00.html>. News about the opening of this pub reached Romania in the midst of a scandal over the state-sponsored participation of two former secret police informers in a summer school organized by the Romanian Cultural Institute in Berlin, which also stirred the protests of several German writers from Romania. See Herta Müller, “Spitzel in der Sommerakademie,” *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 17 July 2008, <http://www.fr-online.de/kultur/rumaenisches-kulturinstitut-spitzel-in-der-sommerakademie,1472786,3315386.html>.

of remembering originate before 1989. It records the evolution of these recollections and establishes a connection between the time and the content of remembering. In other words, the dynamics of memory sketched below suggest that the time of recollection strongly influences not only personal accounts of the past, but also public representations. The first part focuses on the pre-1989 dynamics of memories. It assesses counter-memories of victims ("us") who recall the illegitimate use of violence against innocent citizens, which opposed the official memories produced by people serving the regime ("them"), who underlined the legitimate role of this institution in defending national interests. These two types of recollections differed not in essence, but in their focus, for while official memories referred only to the communist victims of the Securitate, the underground memory aimed to rescue from oblivion the publicly silenced noncommunist victims. The myth of the omnipotence of the Securitate was the result of this pre-1989 dual process of remembering. The second part deals with the post-1989 institutionalization of counter-memory as the single most morally correct way of remembering communism. In the postcommunist period, almost all people claimed to be victims of the former regime. Thus, public representations of the past concentrated on the memory of "us," those who suffered under communism because of "them," the men of the former regime. This approach achieved the goal of commemorating the many victims of Romanian communism and the few heroes of anticommunist struggle. However, the inaccessibility of the secret police files made it practically impossible to identify perpetrators. In the absence of transitional justice, the Securitate was held to be collectively accountable for past wrongdoings and, as the alleged sole victor of the revolution, directly responsible for present adversities. The third and concluding part analyzes the watershed provoked by the opening of the Securitate archives and the subsequent process of disclosing the network of diverse complicities, which shifted the public interest from former employees to hitherto unknown informants. This part traces both the personal recollections of people who were disclosed as former collaborators and the memory of communism as codified in the former secret police files.

Astonishingly, these documents showed that many people who championed anticommunism after 1989, implicitly associating themselves with "us" (the innocent victims and the brave heroes of the recent past), had been associated with the secret police before 1989. These documents demonstrated that the broad categories of victims and perpetrators are too imprecise to either represent the recent past or to define Romanians' relations to it. The Securitate archives revealed that many Romanians remembered the communist past from a morally correct position, but utterly failed to remember and come to terms with their own pasts.

Before 1989: The Securitate Is Controlling Us

Paradoxically, Nicolae Ceaușescu himself formulated the idea that the Securitate ranked above all other national institutions and that it was the only institution responsible for repression in communist Romania. Under his guidance, in 1967, the Central Committee held a meeting to remember the “abusive and illegal” actions of the Securitate while allegedly escaping the control of the party and acting only under the direct orders of Ceaușescu’s predecessor, Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. The meeting took place after a thorough scrutiny of the Securitate’s activities shortly after Ceaușescu took over the party leadership. At that time, the last remaining oppositional groups resisting in the mountains had been suppressed by secret police troops, while the former elites had been rendered defunct via imprisonment. Because these successful operations had already destroyed the potential for revolt within Romanian society, Gheorghiu-Dej granted a general amnesty to all political prisoners in 1964. The report about the activity of the Securitate presented three years later by the newly appointed secretary general recalled the merits of this institution in the struggle against the enemies of the regime, but also unexpectedly criticized the repressive measures undertaken by the secret police against prominent party members in the late 1940s and early 1950s.⁶ This critical assessment clearly served to supply this fundamental institution of the communist system with a new identity by underscoring its recent criminal past.

Students of communism recognize such criticism as a belated Khrushchev-style public acknowledgment of one aspect of repression, involving the targeting of prominent party members. This type of de-Stalinization did not have further effects, such as subsequent reforms.⁷ Romania remained one of the most

⁶ At the Plenum of the CC of the RCP on 26 and 27 June 1967, Ceaușescu presented a report on the Ministry of the Interior, to which the secret police belonged. He mentioned the important role played by the Securitate in destroying all forms of opposition, but raised doubts about the legality of its actions against Communist Party members. In also criticized the release of all political prisoners in 1964, as there was insufficient personnel available to supervise these potential enemies after their liberation. In conclusion, Ceaușescu claimed that the Securitate must be returned under party control, from which it had escaped under the previous leadership. Monica Grigore, “Ceaușescu și redefinirea raporturilor dintre partid și Securitate, 1967–1968,” in *Arhivele Securității*, ed. Silviu Moldovan (Bucharest: Nemira, 2004), 395–420.

⁷ The Polish philosopher Leszek Kołakowski remarked that what the analysts of the communist world called de-Stalinization (a term never used officially behind the Iron Curtain) represented for Khrushchev and the other Soviet leaders merely an attempt to correct errors, to play down the cult of personality, and to return to the Leninist norms of party life. Leszek Kołakowski, *The Main Currents of Marxism, Vol. III: The Breakdown* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 450–56. In the case of Ceaușescu, this type of criticism consolidated his personal power over potential rivals within the party, while in the long run allowed the institutionalization of the most ostentatious cult of personality in late communism.

Stalinist countries in the Soviet bloc up to 1989.⁸ Nevertheless, open discussion about the activity of the Securitate, which had previously taken place in total secrecy, represented an event without precedence in a country in which Khrushchev's secret speech of 1956 had practically no immediate consequences.⁹ Some of the communist victims of this institution were rehabilitated after a commission investigated the dubious circumstances in which the evidence of guilt had been collected. The commission therefore discovered something that was well-known among party members: that the purged persons, some of whom formerly prominent leaders, like Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu, Vasile Luca, Ana Pauker, or Teohari Georgescu, had been condemned (in some cases to death) on the basis of fake confessions obtained during torture.¹⁰ For ordinary Romanians, the rehabilitation of communists, which was made public during the Plenum of the CC of the RCP on 22 and 25 April 1968, represented the first open recognition of repression.¹¹ The Securitate was solely held responsible for these past wrongdoings, since Ceaușescu exonerated the party of any guilt by claiming that all abuses had been committed at a time when the party had lost control over it.¹² Although it emerged only from Ceaușescu's need to eliminate his main political rival, Alexandru Drăghici, and simultaneously destroy the legacy of his predecessor, Gheorghiu-Dej, the alleged autonomy of the Securitate in

⁸ This is the central argument in Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003).

⁹ Although the famous secret speech of 1956 did not cause much turmoil in the upper party ranks, a few top apparatchiks began to advocate de-Stalinization, which they interpreted solely as a condemnation of the crimes against party members. It is interesting to note that they used similar arguments against Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej by obliquely accusing him of the crimes committed by the Securitate and by criticizing the illegal direct subordination of this institution to the supreme leader (Stelian Tănase, *Elite și societate: Guvernarea Gheorghiu-Dej, 1948–1965* [Bucharest: Humanitas, 1998], 125–35).

¹⁰ The transcripts of the interrogations, as well as the reports about the investigation, are reproduced in Gheorghe Buzatu and Mircea Chirțoiu, eds., *Agresiunea comunismului în România: Documente din arhivele secrete, 1944–1989*, 2 vols. (Bucharest: Paideia, 1998), vol. 1, 163–232, and vol. 2, 86–120.

¹¹ Ceaușescu did not rehabilitate all the purged communists. The Romanian Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu was recognized as a hero who was unjustly executed, but the Jew Ana Pauker or the Hungarian Vasile Luca were not. See Pavel Câmpeanu, *Ceaușescu, anii numărătorii inverse* (Bucharest: Polirom, 2002).

¹² Following the report on the activity of the Securitate at the plenum of June 1967, the control of the party was reinforced via a decision of the Executive Committee of the CC of the RCP on 13 July 1967. The Securitate was completely reorganized following decree 710/21 July 1967 of the State Council. Later, the decree 295/3 April 1968 relinquished the Securitate of its control of the Ministry of the Interior and placed it directly under the supervision of the Council of Ministers. Both decrees clearly stated that the newly established Council of the State Security was directly responsible for its activity in front of the CC of the RCP. The relevant documents are reproduced in Florica Dobre et al., eds., *Securitatea: Structuri/cadre, obiective și metode, Vol. II: 1967–1989* (Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2006), 16–18, 74–79, 251–54.

relation to other state institutions became a commonplace among Romanians.¹³ The idea that the secret police was the most powerful organization in the country, acting on its own and in control of everything, induced the majority of the population into submission. After 1989, this belief also contributed to the emergence of the myth that the Securitate organized the revolution. Moreover, in the postcommunist era, this obsession with the former secret police generated a “one-dimensional lustration,” which focused only on disclosures of the former officers and collaborators, while totally neglecting *nomenklatura* members.¹⁴

The simulation of a new beginning orchestrated by Ceaușescu was not entirely built on criticism of the secret police for having carried out repression, since this would have undermined the very foundation of the regime. Ceaușescu strove to build a new reputation for the Securitate. While Gheorghiu-Dej and Drăghici were solely blamed for the past abuses and illegal acts committed by the secret police, Romanian publishing houses promoted well-written spy novels whose main characters were Securitate officers. A genre popular among readers, such spy thrillers were intended to instill the idea that a new generation of cadres was replacing those guilty of using inappropriate means. The characters were so nice and so devoted to the fight against “evil” that they rarely failed to win the sympathy of the reader. Thus, apparently innocent questions carefully inserted by the author—“Why haven’t I ever considered pursuing a career in the Securitate?”—seemed less absurd.¹⁵ Moreover, characters who enjoyed enough popularity to generate an entire series of novels were portrayed as being “one of us.” The most famous character was arguably major Minerva Tutovan, a kind of anti-Miss Marple, an authoritative lady with a very sharp mind who, before joining the Securitate, was a high school mathematics teacher with a reputation for being very demanding, but also a fair judge of her students’ performance. She had left her job as a teacher in order to use her intelligence to catch Western spies interested in stealing Romanian inventions.¹⁶ Such novels used to be ex-

¹³ The criticism of the Securitate represented an implicit criticism of the late head of the party, Gheorghiu-Dej, to whom the Securitate was answerable. This was also a direct attack on the Minister of the Interior, Alexandru Drăghici, who had directly supervised the Securitate since 1952 and had been Ceaușescu’s main competitor for the party leadership in 1965. In order to put all the blame for the past abuses on Gheorghiu-Dej and Drăghici, and absolve the rest of the party leadership, Ceaușescu maintained that the secret police had extracted itself from party control and acted under the direct orders of the supreme leader.

¹⁴ Daniel Barbu, *Politica pentru barbari* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2005), 139–53.

¹⁵ The quotation is taken from a popular spy novel by Haralamb Zincă, *Moartea vine pe bandă de magnetofon* (Bucharest: Editura Militară, 1967), 27.

¹⁶ The series of novels with Minerva Tutovan, written by Rodica Ojog-Brașoveanu, opened in 1971 and continued until the end of communism. The spy novel *Omul de la capătul firului* (The man at the other end of the line) was transformed by the film director Geo Saizescu into a comical cinematic narrative entitled *Șantaj* (Blackmail) in 1982 and attracted large audiences (Grid Modorcea, *Dicționarul filmului românesc de ficțiune* [Bucharest: Cartea Românească,

tremely popular.¹⁷ It is obviously difficult to measure how effective such oblique propaganda was for the new Securitate, but the documents of the former secret police show that in 1968 the basis for a new network of surveillance had been created by attracting young, intelligent, ambitious, and highly educated individuals.¹⁸ Some post-1989 recollections confirm this sustained effort of coopting promising intellectuals.¹⁹ After 1968 collaboration with the former secret police became an acceptable choice for many. The ambiguous legacy of moral relativism generated by this development is still evident in current debates about the meaning of collaboration with the Securitate.

The astonishing public indictment of the secret police from 1967 to 1968 was never repeated until 1989. However, it had a lasting effect on the Romanian public. After 1968, the repression of recollections of the Gheorghiu-Dej era was unofficially supported by a new genre in Romanian literature, the so-called novel of the “obsessive decade,” referring to the 1950s. These fictional works, which the naïve public held to be highly critical, and sometimes even considered as quasi-dissident writings, were in fact designed to denigrate the era of

2004], 328–29). Although the Minerva novels featured a Securitate officer, some were reprinted after 1989, while others, such as *Spionaj la mănăstire* (Espionage at a monastery), *Omul de la capătul firului* (The man at the other end of the line), *Minerva se dezlănțuie* (Minerva unleashes herself), *Noapți albe pentru Minerva* (White nights for Minerva), are available on the Internet (<http://findebookkee.com/r/rodica-ojog>). The author came from a wealthy family of liberal professionals and was expelled from university because of her father's arrest, forced to undergo “reeducation at the working place” in a factory and only then allowed to take the entrance exam to reapply for a place at university. She also wrote novels in which the nostalgia for interwar Bucharest was very prominent. In short, her own career illustrates the collaboration of the old elite with the new regime. See the interview with the author: “În vizită la marea maestră a romanului polițist,” *Formula AS* 369 (1999), <http://www.formula-as.ro/1999/369/lumea-romaneasca-24/in-vizita-la-marea-maestra-a-romanului-politist-rodica-ojog-brasoveanu-675>.

¹⁷ The novels recently became popular again among young people who have no experience of communism, and who read these novels without taking into consideration the ideological message.

¹⁸ Over 30% of the employees of this institution were replaced in 1968. First, the elimination of non-Romanian elements initiated by Gheorghiu-Dej continued until minorities were represented proportionally to the population of Romania as a whole. Second, the recruitment of informers was extended to include a larger number of people with higher education. Approximately 36.5% of the newly recruited informers in 1968 were “intellectuals,” that is, individuals with a higher education. See the statistical data presented in Elis Neagoe-Pleșa, “1968—Anul reformării agenturii Securității,” *Caietele CNSAS: Revistă semestrială editată de Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității* 1, no. 1 (2008): 11.

¹⁹ See the series of recollections posted as critical comments to the topic “Securității erau analfabeți” (The Securitate people were illiterate), which maintain that those who joined the Securitate as employees and collaborators were not stupid, but often among the most intelligent and ambitious young people of their generation (<http://morar.catavencu.ro/2008/07/24/securistii-erau-analfabeti>).

Ceaușescu's predecessor and, by comparison, to glorify his own. Moreover, the novels seemed to herald a new period in Romania's communist history, one that was not only critical of past mistakes, but also of the root of these mistakes, that is, the Soviet Union.²⁰ In fact, the wave of popular sympathy that Ceaușescu enjoyed after his open criticism of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968 was nurtured by these writings. Such literature, created with one notable exception by individuals who had not experienced the horrors of the Romanian Gulag,²¹ depicted the unjust imprisonment of ordinary people or the forced appropriation of their land for use as collective farms.²² In other words, these writings were works of fiction conveying not the "truth" about the years of terror, but testimonies of the time in which they were written.²³ It became clear how little Ceaușescu's regime was willing to reveal about the Romanian Gulag when one such book, written by the novelist Marin Preda, one of the most highly regarded authors of the time, was withdrawn from the bookstores.²⁴ The novel focused on a university professor of philosophy whose ideas led to his imprisonment and subsequent reeducation in jail by semiliterate torturers.²⁵ Needless to say, the profile of the victim did not correspond to what Ceaușescu admitted

²⁰ The significance of 1968 in Romanian history is a matter of controversy. While the former *nomenklatura* and neocommunists in postcommunist politics consider this moment to be Romania's finest hour, the opposing camp is critical and emphasizes the deceitful nature of Ceaușescu's balcony speech, which marked apparently the beginning of a period of liberalization, but represented in reality the beginning of closures. Michael Shafir has summed up the ambiguous nature of Ceaușescu's rule with the concept of "simulated change." See his *Romania. Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985).

²¹ The exception was the writer Alexandru Ivasiuc, the author of the novel *Păsările* (The birds) (Bucharest, Cartea Românească, 1971). The literary critic Monica Lovinescu, who pursued a successful career from 1962 with the Romanian desk of Radio Free Europe (RFE) and made a mark as the most astute commentator on literature, wrote a review of this novel. She remarked that criticism of Stalinism was unsubstantiated because it spoke of the communist victims as "collateral damage" of a truly revolutionary transformation. Thus, Lovinescu maintained, Ivasiuc transformed valuable experience to fit the perspective of the regime. The review was broadcast from her office in Paris in 1971 and was later published in Monica Lovinescu's *Unde scurte, Vol. I: Jurnal indirect* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990), 486–89.

²² A review of such literary works was published in Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Gulagul în conștiința românească: Memorialistica și literatura închisorilor comuniste* (Iași: Polirom, 2005), 306–27.

²³ This explains the harsh and somewhat unjust criticism received after 1989, consisting mostly of arguments of the type "the glass was half empty."

²⁴ Marin Preda, *Cel mai iubit dintre pământeni* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1980). Although this book was withdrawn from bookstores, it continued to circulate underground and was sold at high prices on the black market.

²⁵ Monica Lovinescu also remarked that this was a different kind of novel about the "obsessive decade." Her review gives credence to the main character's comments about the regime in an essay with the telling title "The Era of Bastards." Monica Lovinescu, *Unde scurte, Vol. III: Posteritatea contemporană* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1994), 131–41.

about repression, and the novel depicted too accurately the daily subordination to mediocrity that the regime was practicing on a very large scale. In short, Marin Preda, whom one might see as the Vasily Grossman of Romania,²⁶ touched a sensitive note, according to which terror was not a regrettable deviation from the revolutionary ideals, but the very essence of the system itself.

The literature on the “obsessive decade” was promoted by the regime only insofar as it conveyed the idea that the secret police’s infamous past deeds ended together with the dictator Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej. Such novels played an important role in Ceaușescu’s Romania, notwithstanding the clichés or their self-imposed silence about taboo issues. Above all, they touched upon a subject that was overlooked in historical writings and absent from textbooks. The literary depictions of the Romanian Gulag were clearly meant to serve the new party leadership’s interest in showing that the mistakes of the past would not be repeated. However, this message had a perverse effect upon educated Romanian readers. On the one hand, such writings acted as substitutes for the almost total lack of testimonies from prisons and kept alive the idea that “real existing socialism” was potentially repressive. In the absence of publications based on direct experiences of prison survivors (like *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*) the novels of the “obsessive decade” with their depictions of imaginary Gulags were the best available alternative. On the other hand, these descriptions eased the task of the secret police. Since the prospect of spending time in prison seemed so frightening, the alternative of submitting willingly appeared to be the most reasonable choice.

Genuine recollections of the Romanian Gulag, an enterprise confined to private circles or made public only from exile, had the same perverse effect. Everywhere in the Soviet bloc, the living memory of the great terror provided the basis of “counter-memory,” the body of recollections that circulated after the 1960s within the frame of the alternative society and stimulated the emergence

²⁶ In 1980, Marin Preda was one of the most popular novelists in Romania. He was inspired by his experience as the son of a peasant from a small village in the great Danubian plain. Prior to his last novel, Preda was faithful to the regime. He began his career with a novel about collectivization called *Desfășurarea* (The unfolding), and he later wrote what is considered to be his masterpiece, *Moromeții* (The Moromete family), the saga of a peasant family that struggled to fight poverty and preserve a small piece of land at the time of turbulent political changes from the late the 1930s to the 1950s. The first volume was published in 1956 and received the State Literary Award. Preda also had an influence in the rehabilitation of Marshall Ion Antonescu. His novel *Delirul* (Delirium), published in 1975, presented Antonescu as a man concerned about the future of Romania; this image of the leader diverged from the official view, which presented the Marshall as a fascist dictator who ruined Romania by allying it with Nazi Germany. In reality, such an image mirrored Ceaușescu’s turn toward nationalism. Soon after the publication of his novel featuring the imprisoned professor, Preda died in dubious circumstances at the age of only fifty-eight, without having suffered illness. His death provoked a flurry of comments suggesting that the Securitate had been involved. Proof of this was not found, even after 1989, but the rumors enhanced public interest in his books.

of a public sphere beyond the control of the regime. "Counter-memory was for the most part an oral memory transmitted between close friends and family members and spread to society via unofficial networks," Svetlana Boym pointed out, but it did not necessarily convey an explicit message.²⁷ The sufferings in the Romanian Gulag remained mostly untold until 1989.²⁸ Some former political prisoners shared their recollections of prison life within their circles of friends while the communist regime was still in power, as depicted in some memoirs and interviews published after 1989.²⁹ Some testimonies from the Romanian Gulag reached a wide audience via Radio Free Europe or other such agencies with Romanian-language services. Otherwise, these taboo stories left no material traces. It is therefore difficult to assess the extent of this oral transmission of counter-memory from the old generation (with firsthand experience of prisons) to the next one which, despite a few notable exceptions, was spared such a fate.³⁰ Many former victims were either not prepared or not willing to remember.³¹ The more inhumane a past experience was, the less one was will-

²⁷ Counter-memory represented whatever conflicted with the official version of the past. Impossible to record in writing, it was transmitted orally, often in allusive forms. "The alternative vision about the past ... was rarely discussed explicitly; rather it was communicated through half-words, jokes and double speak... Often counter-memory consisted in finding blemishes in the official narrative of history or even in one's own life" (Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* [New York: Basic Books, 2001], 57–71).

²⁸ However, Solzhenitsyn's works, bearing witness to crimes committed in the Soviet Union, but not in Romania, circulated in the country. *The Gulag Archipelago* was translated for the use of the CC of the RCP, while typewritten versions reached a wider audience (Stelian Tănase, "Intellectualii români îl citeau pe Soljenițin pe sub mână," *Cotidianul*, 4 August 2008, http://old.cotidianul.ro/intelectualii_romani_il_citeau_pe_soljenitin_pe_sub_mana-53941.html).

²⁹ An example of this kind of interaction between generations are the recorded conversations between Alexandru Paleologu and Stelian Tănase, published after 1989. Paleologu was part of the Noica-Pillat group of intellectuals, which was put on trial in the aftermath of the Hungarian Revolution, under the pretext of discovering a prohibited book written by their exiled colleague, the Chicago-based historian of religions Mircea Elide. Paleologu was also a signatory of the open letter of seven intellectuals, broadcast by RFE in March 1989. This letter criticized the cultural policy of Ceaușescu's regime. Tănase is one of the signatories of the letter of eighteen young intellectuals, broadcast in December 1989. This letter also focused on cultural issues. For the records of the conversations between the two, see Alexandru Paleologu and Stelian Tănase, *Sfidarea memoriei* (Bucharest: Du Style, 1996). The publication of this volume was also marked by Paleologu's public confession of having been a Securitate informer after his release from prison.

³⁰ A relative of the author, imprisoned for political reasons for five years in the forced labor camp of the Danube–Black Sea Canal, never shared what he went through during that period. When asked to write something about his experience, he refused by saying that, at the moment of his release, he was told that if he spoke about his life in prison, he would return there.

³¹ Tzvetan Todorov has emphasized that many victims were unable to recall the horrors they had been put through, and carried their stories to the grave. See his comments in *Voices from the Gulag: Life and Death in Communist Bulgaria* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999), 34–35.

ing to share it with others. "About Pitești, one is silent," is a common reaction of former inmates from the prison located in this city, which became the epitome of the reeducation process staged by the Securitate.³² In short, until 1989, the very existence of the Romanian Gulag was rarely conveyed in words; instead it was evoked in a photograph of a relative who never returned,³³ or by the air of intrinsic exhaustion and malaise among those who returned. These dramas were present in many circles, but rarely narrated. Silence became second nature to Romanians whose relatives had been in prison, and who wanted to be considered by others as "normal."³⁴

Although Romania never produced a famous witness such as Solzhenitsyn, survivors of the communist prison system left some notable accounts of their experiences. Some of these were published after *The Gulag Archipelago* stirred international interest about the horrors taking place behind the Iron Curtain. Worth mentioning is the tamizdat written by the former political prisoner and future dissident Paul Goma, the first Romanian writer who dared to publish in the West a novel inspired by prison experience.³⁵ In addition, a few samizdat

³² The name "Pitești" symbolizes the perversity and cruelty of the communist regime. It was in the prison of this city that some prisoners were turned into full-time torturers of their inmates. Their task was to completely destroy personalities, wipe out minds, and erase the difference between victims and perpetrators. The first personal account of reeducation in the Pitești prison was Grigore Dumitrescu, *Demascarea* (München: self-published, 1978). Analyses of this phenomenon were made by Romanian exiles and broadcast by RFE. See Virgil Ierunca, *Fenomenul Pitești* (Paris: Limite, 1981). The novel of Paul Goma, *Ostinato* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971), includes a pseudo-dialogue relevant for the memory of the reeducation: "Who was interested in being quiet about Pitești? The torturers? Mostly the victims." This quotation is from the post-1989 Romanian version of *Ostinato* (Bucharest: Univers, 1992), 42.

³³ My grandmother kept the photograph of her son, my unknown uncle, arrested in December 1940 when trying to cross the River Prut from Bessarabia (then under Red Army occupation) into Romania. Consequently, he was deported to the Soviet Union, from where he never returned. She died without finding out what happened to him. It was only in 2006 that my father received (from the attorney general of the Republic of Moldova) the certificate that rehabilitated his brother together with the information that he had been illegally sentenced to death and executed on 1 December 1941.

³⁴ Anton Golopenția (a leading sociologist in interwar Romania and director of the Institute for Statistics) was arrested, framed for an imaginary connection with the Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu group, and imprisoned until his death in 1951. His daughter Sanda remembered: "We were silent in order to avoid references to acts and events from which we wanted to separate ourselves, although we lived entrenched in them. We were simply silent because we wanted to stay normal" (Sanda Golopenția, "Tăceri," in *Cum era?...Cum așa: Amintiri din anii comunismului [românesc]*, ed. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu [Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006], 166–68. For the files of Anton Golopenția's arrest and interrogations, see Sanda Golopenția, ed., *Anton Golopenția: Ultima Carte* [Bucharest: Editura Enciclopedică, 2001]).

³⁵ Following his involvement in protests at the University of Bucharest after the Hungarian Revolution, Goma spent two years in prison, followed by several more years under house arrest. In 1972 and 1973, during a visit to Paris, he wrote a novel inspired by his experience in the Gherla

manuscripts, drawer books, and tape recordings that surfaced after the revolution show that Romanians also struggled against forgetting. Among these underground testimonies, the most influential book was probably the memoirs left by the Jewish-born Greek Orthodox monk Nicolae Steinhardt. A respected personality of the interwar generation, he was imprisoned in 1959 because he refused to be an untruthful witness against his friends, for whom a trial was staged during the post-1956 wave of repression.³⁶ His overall description of prison life matches the stories collected from the Soviet Gulag, where inmates survived by educating each other by sharing readings and lecturing on topics of their expertise. Otherwise, his writings represent a highly emotional narrative about his conversion to Christianity while in prison, an event that is similar to that of Aleksander Wat.³⁷ However, the general message of the book is quite different, as Steinhardt completely turned his back on earthly things in order to reach, as he argued, a higher stage of mental improvement by concentrating on the elevation of his spirit. In short, the book invited readers to withdraw from public life (where liberty was denied) into private niches where one could think freely in solitude. Indeed, Steinhardt's subsequent withdrawal into monastic life seemed to represent an embodiment of the idea that the best way to survive untouched by psychological assaults of a regime that aimed to create the "new man" was to retreat into a life of meditation and search for human perfection through culture. His reputation among intellectual peers triggered interest in his memoirs, so one could even say that his personal account represented a model of exemplary survival under an adversarial regime.³⁸

prison and made a recording of it for RFE. The novel was published in French as *Gherla* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976), and broadcast by the RFE. Goma returned to Romania, where he tried to initiate a human rights movement inspired by Charter 77. He was rearrested, but released due to international pressure and expelled from Romania. In exile he wrote (among other books drawn from his experiences as political prisoner or dissident) a novel in which he gave voice to those who shared with him their experiences of reeducation in the Pitești prison: Paul Goma, *Les chiens de mort, ou, La passion selon Pitești* (Paris: Hachette, 1981).

³⁶ An interesting juxtaposition of memories from the period of the trial with documents of the trial of the group comprising Nicolae Steinhardt is recorded in Stelian Tănase, ed., *Anatomia mistificării: Procesul Noica-Pillat, 1944–1989* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997).

³⁷ The baptism in prison was at the root of his memoirs, which the author held to be a spiritual testament. The author chose to become a monk in a remote Greek Orthodox monastery after his release. There, he was able to write several versions of his memoirs. Some were confiscated, while others survived and circulated as samizdat or were smuggled outside the country to be broadcast by RFE. In Romania, his prison memoirs were published as Nicolae Steinhardt, *Jurnalul Fericii* (Cluj: Dacia, 1991), and were highly praised.

³⁸ According to those imprisoned in the 1950s, there were three techniques of resisting (as one intellectual explained to a French journalist asking why there were no dissidents): revolt; retreat into an imaginary normal life; and resistance through culture. The last was the most effective, and people who chose it had better chances of survival. The conversation (recorded by the se-

In addition to these accounts from the early period of terror, most of which narrate sufferings inflicted upon innocent individuals, encounters with the Securitate were remembered in dissident writings of late communism. The few critical texts produced by Romanian intellectuals in the 1980s speak about the widespread fear inflicted by this institution, which was perceived as a “Big Brother” that closely supervised everyone in the country in order to nip in the bud any protest against the regime.³⁹ The open letter by the poet Mircea Dinescu is particularly memorable. He claimed that the plates in the restaurant of the Writers’ Union were in fact listening devices. It is not clear if he was indeed bearing witness to a real event or if he was only using a literary metaphor to express the general belief in the ubiquity of the Securitate. However, his letter is symptomatic of the pandemic malaise generated by the secret police in the late 1980s, while his bugged porcelain plate has turned into a symbol of the “Big Brother” syndrome. The omnipresence of the Securitate was a commonplace of late Romanian communism, which made all people believe that any protest could be disclosed and result in immediate imprisonment. Besides dissident writings, memoirs and drawer books from before the revolution illustrate that, in the 1980s, a large majority of Romanians were still haunted by the prospect of imprisonment despite the fact that the regime had already changed its methods of control from randomly applied repression to extensively disseminated fear.⁴⁰ Regarding their own country as a huge prison in which everybody should seek ways of surviving, a large majority of prominent intellectuals associated their “resistance through culture”⁴¹ with a “withdrawal into the monastery of the spirit.”⁴²

cret police) is in Serviciul Român de Informații (SRI), *Cartea Albă a Securității: Istorii literare și artistice, 1969–1989* (Bucharest: Presa Românească, 1996), 413–18.

³⁹ Most Romanian dissidents reiterated a commonplace, according to which the efficiency of the Securitate ensured the survival of the communist regime. The dissident Dan Petrescu considered that the regime survived thanks to the implicit collaboration of the silent and obedient population. See fragments of this essay in *Libération*, 15 February 1988; the complete text was broadcast by RFE.

⁴⁰ The fear of being arrested and imprisoned is very vividly conveyed in the diary of Stelian Tănase, *Ora oficială de iarnă* (Iași: Institutul European, 1995).

⁴¹ For more on the significance of “resistance through culture,” see my study “Eastern Europe, Central Europe or Europe? A Comparative Analysis of Central European Dissent and Romanian ‘Resistance through Culture,’” in *Europa im Ostblock: Vorstellungen und Diskurse (1945–1991)*, eds. José M. Faraldo, Paulina Gulińska-Jurgiel, and Christian Domnitz (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2008), 231–49.

⁴² Romanian intellectuals repeatedly argued that the only realistic strategy of survival was to “resist through culture.” See the interview of the literary critic Mircea Iorgulescu, published in *La Nouvelle Alternative* 16, December 1989, 76–77. Iorgulescu was also recently exposed as a former informant of the secret police. This raises serious doubts about the meaning of “resistance through culture.” Although many argue that it had nothing to do with culture, for it did not produce the expected great literary and artistic works, it also had nothing to do with resistance, as many of its practitioners proved to be collaborators of the secret police.

It has been argued that Central European intellectuals used the adversities of the regime to rebuild lost solidarities around issues of common interest and ultimately cause the downfall of communism.⁴³ Romanian intellectuals responded differently to these “uses of adversity” and sought instead individual paths to salvation. Prison memoirs that aimed to preserve the memory of a tragic experience also contributed toward this aim. In contrast to the novels of the “obsessive decade,” which suggested that the great terror already passed, the survivors of the Romanian Gulag supported the idea that repression was the essence of the communist system. Their memories (even when stories about the brutality of the secret police or the sufferings in prison were not explicit) inhibited revolt. Recalling his own experience in prison, Aleksander Wat concluded that the Soviet dictator imprisoned so many people because they were expected to bear witness to the horrors; Stalin thereby induced those who remained outside to keep silent.⁴⁴ Thus, one can assume that large-scale imprisonment in early communist Romania was not intended to punish those in jail, but to frighten the ones outside. The very presence of a silent former political prisoner, and the absence of those who never returned, reminded people of cruel fates that nobody wanted to share and implicitly encouraged passivity.⁴⁵ In short, the firm belief that the Securitate was controlling everything prevented most Romanians from standing up to the communist regime. In reaction to this silence, their anti-communism erupted after the dictatorship had collapsed.

⁴³ Timothy Garton Ash’s account of the dissident movements in Poland, the former Czechoslovakia, and Hungary claims that civil society in these countries was built in response to the adversity imposed by communist regimes on their own citizens, whose rights were systematically violated. See his *The Uses of Adversity: Essays on the Fate of Central Europe* (Cambridge: Granta Books, 1989).

⁴⁴ “The point was not to correct the five or fifteen million prisoners.... Someone from every family was in a camp.... The point was for everyone to feel that threat at every moment, to know that the camps were terrible and that one could not speak about them because this was something holy, sacred. To use the prisoners to educate the rest of the population who had not yet been put in camps” (Aleksander Wat, *My Century: The Odyssey of a Polish Intellectual* [New York: New York Review of Books, 1977], 232).

⁴⁵ In addition to the memory of the years of terror, there was a more recent case that shook Romanians. In 1985, the engineer Gheroghe Ursu was arrested by the Securitate after being accused by colleagues of keeping a secret diary containing critical remarks about the communist regime. He was then savagely beaten to death while in prison. Although singular, this tragic case deepened the conviction that all those who dared express criticism of the regime would meet a similar end. However, none of the dissidents of the 1970s and the 1980s shared such a fate. Since Ursu was not an open critic of the regime and was therefore unknown to Western agencies monitoring the violation of human rights, the communist authorities treated him far less cautiously than dissidents who were internationally known. For the report about Ursu’s death, see SRI, *Cartea Albă a Securității*, 503.

After 1989: The Securitate Is Manipulating Us

It is a commonplace in postcommunist Romania that the instrument of terror, the (in)famous Securitate, outlived communism. The way in which communism collapsed, as well as the way in which the transition unfolded, merely reinforced the idea that the Securitate was still in control of the country. In December 1989, although communism had already collapsed elsewhere in Eastern Europe, the revolution came as a surprise for most Romanians. Only after the television broadcast about Ceaușescu's flight, did the uprising spread from Timișoara and Bucharest to other cities. The passive majority only gradually realized that the miracle of overthrowing the dictatorship was a reality that happened even in Romania in spite of their silence and inaction. Only the day before, everyone was too afraid of the secret police to dare even whispering something critical about the regime; one day later, everyone was dancing on the streets to celebrate liberation from a regime of fear and frustration. Paradoxically, it was the powerful Securitate that refrained from defending the secretary general and the Communist Party. Its officers sat and watched the outcome of the uprising, then surrendered themselves to the self-appointed leaders of the revolution in each city.⁴⁶

During those days of ad hoc solidarity and national pride, everyone was grateful that the Securitate did not engage in fighting, for this would have led to even higher casualties in what was the only violent revolution in Eastern Europe at that time. Since the revolution was unexpectedly successful, many Romanians also hoped that all those who supported the communist dictatorship would withdraw from public life once the regime came to an end, thus paving the way for a new regime and new people. The urgent call for moral societal regeneration by "living in truth," which dissidents had advocated for decades throughout Eastern Europe, also became a commonplace in Romania after 1989.⁴⁷ Critical

⁴⁶ The feature films about the Romanian revolution echo collective perceptions of this event. *Cum mi-am petrecut sfârșitul lumii* (The way I spent the end of the world) by Cătălin Mitulescu (2006) explains the "unexplainable" revolution by suggesting that it had been sparked off by a child who had no notion of the widespread fear that paralyzed adult Romanians. The confusion of those days, which claimed so many casualties and provoked public rage against the Securitate, is recorded in *Hîrtia va fi albastră* (The paper will be blue) by Radu Munteanu (2006). Finally, *A fost sau nu a fost* (12:08 east of Bucharest) by Corneliu Porumboiu (2006) expresses not only the idea that the revolution and Ceaușescu's downfall took the people in a small Moldovan city by surprise, but that the Securitate was the real victor of the revolution.

⁴⁷ Timothy Garton Ash captured this moral dimension of dissidence in *The Magic Lantern: The Revolutions of '89 Witnessed in Warsaw, Budapest, Berlin, and Prague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993). Many analyses of these revolutions and their aftermath also underline the interconnection between moral societal regeneration and genuine democratic transformation, in which citizens from former communist countries (wrongly) believed. See Vladimir Timăneanu, ed., *Revolutions of 1989* (London: Routledge, 1999).

intellectuals in this country succeeded (at least after the revolution) in organizing themselves and emerging as a powerful public voice that provided answers to questions in the name of ordinary people. To this day, the appeal made by the philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu to *lichele* (malefactors), that is, to all people who had supported the communist regime by participating in the daily lies, symbolized the moral dimension of the Romanian revolution. In this short text, inspired by Václav Havel, the author asked the men of the former regime to step down, reflect upon the harm they had done for so many years, and then ask forgiveness from their victims.⁴⁸

Far from withdrawing, representatives of the former regime in fact prepared to play an important role in the postcommunist period as well. In spite of calls from the emerging civil society to initiate the lustration from public life of the human remnants of the communist regime,⁴⁹ the first free elections were won by a newly emerging political group whose leaders included many second- and third-rank members of the *nomenklatura*, even though it did not lay claim to continuity with the Communist Party.⁵⁰ While former apparatchiks managed to stay in power after the anticommunist revolution by presenting themselves as “saviors of the nation,” the emerging opposition appealed to continue the revolution in order to enable the country to truly rid itself of communism.⁵¹ Consequently, the major confrontation was between communists and anticommunists.

The anticommunism upheld by Romanians had two dimensions. One was political, as it shaped the elections until 1996, when former communist apparatchiks finally left power, and still continues to influence electoral strategies. In

⁴⁸ Gabriel Liiceanu, “Apel către lichele,” *Revista 22* (Bucharest) 1, December 1989, republished in idem, *Apel către lichele* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992).

⁴⁹ The most important document calling for the lustration was the so-called “Proclamația de la Timișoara” (The proclamation of Timișoara), delivered by members of various newly established nongovernmental associations on 11 March 1990 in the very city that had initiated the revolution of 1989. This document represented the catalyst of civil society in postcommunist Romania. The text of this document is reprinted in Domnița Ștefănescu, *Cinci ani din istoria României: O cronologie a evenimentelor decembrie 1989–decembrie 1994* (Bucharest: Mașina de Scris, 1995), 451–57. For an account of the context in which the document was drafted, see Milodrag Milin, *Timișoara în Revoluție și după* (Timișoara: Marineasa, 1997).

⁵⁰ The National Salvation Front (NSF) won the parliamentary elections of 20 May 1990 with 66.31% of the valid votes for the Chamber of Deputies, and 67.02% for the Senate. Its leader, Ion Iliescu, the former member of the CC of the RCP and leader of NSF, won an overwhelming 85.07% in the presidential elections. This was by far the highest score that the former communists registered in post-1989 Eastern Europe. The subsequent elections in 1992 were also won by this party, which in the meantime had been renamed the Party of Social Democracy in Romania, after it lost its most reformist members.

⁵¹ Corneliu Coposu, the emblematic leader of the reestablished National Peasant Party, held Ion Iliescu directly responsible for the persistence of communist habits, such as the manipulation of truth, in postcommunism (Corneliu Coposu, *Dialoguri cu Vartan Arachelian* [Bucharest: Anastasia, 1991], 120–22).

short, anticommunism defined the polarization of the political spectrum in post-communist Romania. The second dimension was civic, as it stimulated the mobilization of civil society after 1989. The cleavage between state and an alternative society, which was characteristic of post-Helsinki Central European countries, applied not to communist, but to early postcommunist Romania.⁵² Politically, the most coherent group that promoted anticommunism consisted of former political prisoners, most of whom were key members of the so-called “historical parties,” precommunist parties that reemerged after the revolution. Public intellectuals epitomized civil society, as they did before the collapse of communism in countries such as Hungary or the former Czechoslovakia. The two dimensions of anti-communism also reflected a gap between two generations. Apart from a few individuals who could belong to either category, the “historical parties” provided an inescapable haven for all people who had reached political maturity at the moment of the communist takeover, while public intellectuals consisted mostly of people who had been socialized exclusively under communism.⁵³ Although their ideas and agendas were not identical, both groups defined themselves as anti-communists. Lustration was part of this ethos from the very beginning of the Romanian transition. With the neocommunists jealously guarding the access to all archives of communism and adamantly refusing to accept any form of lustration, the anticommunists were prepared to fight against this appropriation of the past. In short, postcommunist political and societal conflicts in Romania were shaped by the battle for memory over amnesia.

In this context, the once repressed counter-memory of the Romanian Gulag was institutionalized as the memory of communism that was consistent not only with the essence of the former regime, but also with the goals of the transition. As long as Romanians continued to vote for the neocommunists, the past would not end. In order to put this period behind them, it was important to educate Romanians by making the criminal nature of the system known to the public.⁵⁴

⁵² This impression was enhanced during the so-called “Piața Universității” (University Square) event of 1990, a nonstop protest in the center of Bucharest. Pressing for the withdrawal of the former communist apparatchiks from power, it echoed the great street revolts that preceded the demise of other former communist countries in 1989. See Mihnea Berindei, Ariadna Combes, and Anne Panche, *Roumanie. Le livre blanc: La réalité d'un pouvoir néo-communiste* (Paris: La Découverte, 1990).

⁵³ Cristian Mititelu, the former director of the BBC's Romanian service, provided insight into the societal and generational cleavage between former political prisoners and critical intellectuals in *Cei care au spus NU: Oponenți și disidenți din anii '70 și '80* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2005), 216–17.

⁵⁴ The Romanian Gulag, its heroes, victims, and perpetrators, was the basis of a series of documentaries broadcast from 1991 by the Romanian national television company. Entitled *Memorialul durerii* (Memorial of suffering) and directed by Lucia Hossu-Longin, it was broadcast late at night, attracting a large audience. The documentaries, now available in print and on DVD, revealed in public for the first time the inhumane treatment meted out in communist

Accordingly, the first permanent exhibition about communism, the Sighet Memorial, opened without any state support under the motto: "When justice does not succeed into being a form of memory, memory itself can be a form of justice."⁵⁵ The location of this museum (in the former communist prison in which the majority of interwar politicians had died) also reveals a lot about the way in which the recent past was appropriated. Moreover, the name of this site of memory, "Memorial for the victims of and resisters against communism," illustrates what part of the recent past was considered worth remembering, that is, the suffering and bravery of Romanians under communism. In a nutshell, the prison cell is the best symbol for the postcommunist public representation of Romanian communism.

Although only a handful of victims were initially able or willing to bear witness to the atrocities experienced during their imprisonment, once the (self-)imposed silence shrouding this taboo subject disappeared, the number of such recollections grew rapidly. The preservation of this memory is certainly an act of moral responsibility for every society that emerged out of communism, for the victims and heroes deserve to be remembered by future generations. A few drawer books⁵⁶ and a more substantial number of testimonies of people returning from exile⁵⁷ were the first revelations about the inhumane experiences of

prisons on unjustly condemned inmates. In her introduction, the author claimed that *Memorialul Durerii* was a substitute for history textbooks, which should have adequately conveyed the dignity of people in precommunist Romanian democracy (Lucia Hossu-Longin, *Memorialul Durerii: O istorie care nu se învață la școală* [Bucharest: Humanitas, 2007]).

⁵⁵ The motto was formulated by the poet Ana Blandiana, who was twice prohibited from publishing after she wrote poetry that alluded to the intrusion of the party state into everyday life and the personality cult. The Council of Europe sponsored this museum, which was organized by the Civic Academy Foundation, for which Blandiana acts as president. The museum can be visited virtually at <http://www.memorialsighet.ro>.

⁵⁶ Among the drawer memoirs is the posthumously published narrative by the historian and politician Constantin C. Giurescu, the author of the most popular version of national history that is still a main source of national identity (Constantin C. Giurescu, *Cinci ani și două luni în penitenciarul de la Sighet, 7 mai 1950–5 iulie 1955* [Bucharest: Editura Fundației Culturale Române, 1994]).

⁵⁷ The touching story by the chief of protocol in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs during the Second World War, Constantin Cesianu, is one of the unpublished testimonies written in exile. Cesianu was purged after the communist takeover and sent to work at the labor camp of the Danube–Black Sea Canal. See Constantin Cesianu, *Salvat din infern* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992). Among the narratives published in the West, the most significant are the autobiographical novels by Paul Goma. In addition to his prison novels, there are stories about his dissidence. See Paul Goma, *Le Tremblement des Hommes: Peut-on vivre en Roumanie aujourd'hui?* (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1979); and idem, *Chassé-croisé* (Paris: Hachette, 1983). For the Romanian versions, see *Culorile curcubeului '77* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1990; rpt. Oradea: Multiprint, 1993); a new edition with excerpts from his Securitate files *Culoarea curcubeului '77: Cod "Bărbosul"* (Iași: Polirom, 2005); and idem, *Soldatul cîinelui* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991).

former political prisoners. These were followed by memoirs written after 1989 that defended the ethos that remembrance of past horrors was an imperative for the future of Romanian democracy. Postcommunist oral history projects also tried to capture the recollections of those who did not bear witness in writing, according to the principle that each victim and each hero must find his or her rightful place in the narrative about communism. The memory of the Romanian Gulag represents the most consistent corpus from among these testimonies, while the overall story of suffering and bravery was completed by the recollections of those who, in various forms, had tried to resist the communist regime and therefore clash with the Securitate.

Although such accounts are too numerous to be mentioned here, it is important to note the striking social diversity of people repressed by the communist regime. All societal strata were affected, ranging from members of the interwar political and intellectual elites⁵⁸ to the most humble Romanian peasants.⁵⁹ Whereas few communist leaders were purged,⁶⁰ large numbers of anticommunists from the groups that tried to resist in the mountains after the end of the war (hoping that the “Americans would come” to save Romania) were repressed.⁶¹

⁵⁸ Corneliu Coposu, the former secretary of Iuliu Maniu (the last precommunist leader of the National Peasant Party) and leader of the party after it was “reestablished” in 1989, left some of the most significant accounts by representatives of the interwar generation. See Corneliu Coposu, *Confesiuni: Dialoguri cu Doina Alexandru* (Bucharest: Anastasia, 1996). See also the account of Coposu’s deputy, Ion Diaconescu, *Temnița—Destinul generației noastre: Memorii* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2003).

⁵⁹ The most impressive testimony of the suffering of peasants comes from a woman, Elisabeta Rizea, who became a symbol of resistance to communism after narrating her prison experience, which left her crippled for life because of her refusal to betray others. Irina Nicolau and Theodor Nițu, eds., *Povestea Elisabetei Rizea din Nucșoara: Mărturia lui Cornel Drăgoi* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991). See also the drawer book written by a peasant woman from Bukovina about the Soviet Gulag: Anița Nandriș Culda, *20 de ani în Siberia: Destin bucovinean* (Bucharest: Humanitas 1991).

⁶⁰ Bellu Zilber, a former communist who was condemned in the Lucrețiu Pătrășcanu trial, wrote a unique testimony of the communist practice of staging trials based on fake declarations. His cooperation with the secret police interrogators saved his life, while Pătrășcanu was executed. He left two versions of his memoirs because the Securitate confiscated the first draft, which was later discovered in its archives. Belu Zilber, *Actor în procesul Pătrășcanu: Prima versiune a memoriilor lui Belu Zilber* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1997); and Andrei Șerbulescu (aka Belu Zilber), *Monarhia de drept dialectic: A doua versiune a memoriilor lui Belu Zilber* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991).

⁶¹ The most prolific author who resisted in the mountains was Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu, who was unfortunately also a former sympathizer of the Iron Guard. Ion Gavrilă-Ogoranu, *Brazii se frîng, dar nu se îndoiesc. Rezistența anticomunistă în Munții Făgărașului*, 6 vols. (Timișoara: Marineasa, 1993–2006). See also Cornel Jurju and Cosmin Budeancă, eds., *Suferința nu se dă la frați... Mărturia Lucreției Jurj despre rezistența anticomunistă din Apuseni, 1948–1958* (Cluj: Dacia, 2002); Miodrag Milin, ed., *Rezistența anticomunistă din Munții Banatului: Interviuri și evocări*, 2 vols. (Timișoara: Marineasa, 1998 and 2000).

Students were also among those who stirred revolts under the influence of the Hungarian Revolution of 1956 in Timișora, Cluj, or Bucharest.⁶² Finally, there were post-Helsinki dissidents, who were harassed by the Securitate in the 1970s and 1980s.⁶³ In short, both genders, all social strata, all political persuasions, and all age groups (from teenagers to mature people) shared in a traumatic past under communism.⁶⁴ The diversity of the victims suggests that terror was indeed randomly applied. These touching testimonies demonstrate that crimes against humanity were perpetrated against completely innocent individuals.⁶⁵

In addition to their contribution toward the understanding of the dictatorial past, these narratives (most of which cover the period prior to the general amnesty of 1964) also underpinned the process of democratization. However, these testimonies convey different stories than the ones experienced by the generations that did not live through the great terror. Since human beings tend to remember spontaneously only what was beautiful in their lives and bear witness to their sufferings only when convinced that they should serve a greater cause, memories of common people throughout the former Eastern Europe mostly covered everyday life. This trend generated a wave of post-1989 nostalgia for the “good old times” of sheltered existence, which in its turn challenged (per-

⁶² The testimony of Aurel Baghiu, a former participant in the revolts at the University of Timișoara, is entitled *Printre gratii: Mărturii despre rezistența românească în închisorile comuniste* (Cluj: Zamolxis, 1995). See also Mihaela Sitaru, ed., *Oaza de libertate: Timișoara, 30 octombrie 1956* (Iași: Polirom, 2004).

⁶³ It is worth mentioning the account given by Radu Filipescu (the Romanian Che Guevara look-alike dissident who is featured in the exhibition at Checkpoint Charlie in Berlin) about his adventurous encounters with the Securitate, which also recounts his three years in prison in the 1980s. Herma Köpernik Kennel, *Jogging cu Securitatea: Rezistența tânărului Radu Filipescu* (Bucharest: Universal Dalsi, 1998).

⁶⁴ The best known female testimony is that of Lena Constante, an artist and essayist involved in the Pătrășcanu trial: *L'évasion silencieuse* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 1990; available in English as *The Silent Escape* [Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1995]; and in Romanian as *Evadarea tăcută: 3000 de zile singură în închisorile din România* [Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992]). The prison memoirs of Adriana Georgescu, former secretary of General Nicolae Rădescu (the last head of government before the communist takeover) were published in Paris in 1951, but reached only a small readership; it seems that the Romanian Embassy bought almost all copies. The Romanian version is Adriana Georgescu, *La început a fost sfîrșitul* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992). See also the touching story by Oana Orlea, arrested at the age of sixteen, in *Ia-ți boarfele și mișcă! Interviu realizat de Mariana Marin* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1991).

⁶⁵ Ioan Ioanid, *Închisoarea noastră cea de toate zilele*, 5 vols. (Bucharest: Albatros 1991–1996); Doina Cornea, *Libertate? Convorbiri cu Michel Combes* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1992); Gabriel Andreescu, *Spre o filozofie a disidenței* (Bucharest: Litera, 1992); Dan Petrescu and Liviu Cangeopol, *Ce-ar mai fi de spus: Convorbiri libere într-o țară ocupată* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2000); Viorel Marineasa and Daniel Vighi, eds., *Rusalii '51: Fragmente din deportarea în Bărăgan* (Timișoara: Marineasa, 1994); Smaranda Vultur, ed., *Istorie trăită—istorie povestită: Deportarea în Bărăgan, 1951–1956* (Timișoara: Amarcord, 1997).

haps by default) the narrative about communist crimes. In Romania, accounts about the recent past rarely deal with issues of everyday life and barely yearn for the communist times. Nostalgic remembering has remained mostly private, even during the current economic crisis.⁶⁶ The few nostalgic public accounts emerged exclusively from the largely discredited former *nomenklatura*. Otherwise, most public recollections of communism conveyed stories of sufferings that were imposed on innocent victims who tried to resist the regime. What is more, once codified in public representations, this mode of remembering tended to become exclusive, leaving no space for other forms of memory.

Although the exact number of victims has still not been established,⁶⁷ the centrality of suffering in public representations gave rise to the commonplace according to which Romania experienced the most atrocious dictatorship in the Soviet bloc. Self-victimization characterizes all postcommunist countries;⁶⁸ in contrast to other countries, however, the narrative of suffering during the early years of repression is consistent in Romania with more recent memories of late

⁶⁶ Sociological surveys amply demonstrate the conflict between the public memory of communism (which is consistent with the narrative of the Romanian Gulag) and private family memories, which are generally nostalgic. This conflict is reflected in present-day students' knowledge of the past; they learn in school that communism was "bad," while their parents often tell them that it was "good." The generation of those whose children are now students is most prone to nostalgia. It is old enough to remember the more relaxed 1960s, and at the same time too old to have adapted to a new social and political setting. Thus, around 30% of current students are convinced that the standard of living was higher under communism. Obviously, this opinion is also influenced by the current economic crisis. See the survey of the Romanian university system commissioned by the Agency for Governmental Strategies (<http://www.publicinfo.ro/pagini/sondaje-de-opinie>) as well as more recent opinion polls in 2010–2011 by the Institute for the Investigation of Communist Crimes and the Memory of Romanian Exile (http://www.crimelecomunismului.ro/ro/sondaje_iicmer_csop/).

⁶⁷ The archival records are so scarce that it is unlikely that exact figures will ever be known. There are only estimates of the total number of victims. According to Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu, an engineer and former political prisoner, around 500,000 people died in the Romanian Gulag from 1948 to 1964, while the total number of victims amounted to 1,100,000. In order to estimate the number of persons incarcerated, he counted the prisons, the average number of detainees before and after 1964, the average duration of imprisonment, and the number of deportees. Gheorghe Boldur-Lătescu, *Genocidul comunist în România* (Bucharest: Albatros, 1994), vol. 2, 15–20. The Civic Academy Foundation, the curator of the Memorial of Sighet, considered a total number of 118,000 penal files with an average number of five persons per file, arriving at an estimated 600,000 political prisoners and approx. 2,000,000 victims, figures including those arrested, deported, placed under house arrest, or interned in labor camps in the Soviet Union. Romulus Rusan, *Cronologia și geografia represiunii comuniste din România: Recensămîntul populației concentraționale, 1945–1989* (Bucharest: Fundația Academia Civică, 2007), 61–62.

⁶⁸ This trend emerged in most former communist countries, as István Deák observed in his foreword to Todorov, *Voices from the Gulag*, vii. The horrifying recollections from the Bulgarian Gulag echo the testimonies given by the survivors of the Romanian Gulag.

communism. It is this period of unparalleled everyday hardships that makes this country an exception. Memories of people who can remember communism (who are today over twenty-five) are fraught with humiliation experienced for the sake of biological survival and the fear of potential intrusion into their private thoughts. One example of such recollections from late communism is to be found in the autobiographical novels of the Romanian-born German author Herta Müller. Her writings not only convey the anxiety of police harassment, but also the privileges enjoyed by the representatives of this institution at the time when Romanians endured deep shortages.⁶⁹ Any recollection of the “normalized” 1960s seems indecent when compared to prison memories of the 1950s or to memories of deprivation and malaise from the 1980s. Over the last twenty years of transition from communism, these two types of memories of two different generations have contaminated each other in such a way that one now speaks of “the Gulag” when referring to the adversities of the 1980s.⁷⁰ The common aspect of the two stories of suffering is again the former secret police, the Securitate. This omnipotent and omnipresent institution was responsible for the great terror of early communism, and for the subsequent extensive supervision that terrorized Romanians in later times.⁷¹

All this explains the central place occupied by the Securitate in recollections of sufferings, before and after 1989. The former Romanian secret police haunts not only the memories of the traumatic recent past, but also the perceptions of the troublesome present. The strong belief that the Securitate lies at the origin of everything wrong in Romania did not die with the communist regime. Above all, the mystery that still surrounds the collapse of communism enabled such a conviction to persist. Since it did nothing to defend the regime in December

⁶⁹ Herta Müller, *Der Fuchs war damals schon der Jäger* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1992; rpt. München: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2009); idem, *The Appointment* (London: Portobello Books, 2010).

⁷⁰ “If we are asked today [by a foreigner] about Romania, we are left with merely two topics: Dracula and Ceaușescu—communism and the sufferings we endured. The most severe [sufferings] were experienced in Brașov after [the strike of] 1987: the use of running cold water and gas were heavily restricted, while central heating and hot water were totally suppressed during winter in a ‘middle-class’ neighborhood. We lived in the Gulag and many did not even realize that. Today they have forgotten, including my parents” (comment by “iggyT,” posted on 22 July 2008, to “Povești cu banane din communism/Iepoca de aur,” <http://morar.catavincu.ro/2008/07/21/povesti-cu-banane-din-comunism/#comments>).

⁷¹ In all narratives about Romanian communism, the capacity of this institution to contain revolt or collective criticism explains why Romanians silently endured a regime that had long forgotten that it once promised a better life. For an analysis of the process of coming to terms with the communist past, see Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “The Pitești Syndrome: A Romanian Vergangenheitsbewältigung?,” in *Postdiktatorische Geschichtskulturen im Süden und Osten Europas: Bestandsaufnahme und Forschungsperspektiven*, ed. Stefan Troebst (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010), 502–618.

1989, it must have been the Securitate itself that either kidnapped or even organized the revolution in order to maintain its power and influence in the post-communist order.⁷² The secrecy surrounding its files (which were not opened even after the former communist apparatchiks lost power in elections and the parliament reluctantly passed a law allowing the disclosure of collaborators) prolonged this belief.⁷³ A supreme irony was the memorable phrase, uttered in 2000 by the first noncommunist postcommunist president, Emil Constantinescu, when retiring after his mandate without competing for a new one: “I have been defeated by the Securitate!”⁷⁴ The adversities and uncertainties of the transition generated deep frustration among Romanians, who were unprepared to cope with it, but who could see that many people previously been tied to the communist structures successfully adapted to the new conditions. Throughout Eastern Europe, people linked to the former secret police apparatuses were among those who most readily converted to market economy conditions, regardless of post-communist political dynamics.⁷⁵ Romania and its contested revolution is again an extreme case. According to the late president of the Association of the Former Political Prisoners, Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu, many Romanians remain convinced that “the revolution in December 1989 was transformed into a rotation of cadres, while the power remained in the hands of the same communist secret police structures.”⁷⁶ In sum, the belated transfer of power from the former

⁷² Some novels also convey this commonplace: Mihai Sin, *Quo vadis, Domine?* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1993; rpt. Bucharest: Nemira, 2007).

⁷³ The first shift in power took place after the third free elections of 1996, when the former communist bureaucrats were replaced by a party coalition that emphasized its detachment from the legacy of the old regime. This coalition—the Democratic Convention of Romania—was formed by the “historical parties,” in which former political prisoners held important positions, with the reform-oriented wing of the National Salvation Front. Emil Constantinescu, the former rector of the University of Bucharest who was supported by all “historical parties” as well as by civil society organizations, took over the office of Romania’s president from the former communist apparatchik Ion Iliescu.

⁷⁴ Emil Constantinescu, *Adevărul despre România, 1989–2004: Un președinte în război cu mafia securisto-comunistă* (Bucharest: Universalia, 2004).

⁷⁵ Katherine Verdery developed this argument, demonstrating that the best prepared individuals for the market economy were the “entrepratchiks,” who worked in state-owned foreign trade companies and were able to understand and get used to market practices long before others. Katherine Verdery, *What Was Socialism, and What Comes Next?* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996), 19–38. The epitome of such individuals in Romania is Dan Voiculescu, the leader of the minuscule Conservative Party and a wealthy businessman, who is credited with having made his postcommunist fortune thanks to his knowledge and connections developed during the communist period. He was also exposed as former informant of the Securitate, for which he worked under the code name Felix.

⁷⁶ Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu, “Foreword,” in *Album Memorial: Monumente închinat jertfei, suferinței și luptei împotriva comunismului* (Bucharest: Ziua, 2004), 6. His memoirs from prison are published as idem, *Mărturie și document* (Iași: Polirom, 2008).

communists to the alternative democratic opposition reinforced the idea that the Securitate was the real and perhaps the sole winner of the revolution.

The Turn: The Securitate Is Among Us

Since communist times, Romanians have entertained the strong belief that the Securitate was a “state within the state,” which rose above party control,⁷⁷ and organized the revolution when the time was right.⁷⁸ Moreover, it is believed that the former secret police turned the regime change to its own benefit by maintaining their fellow communist apparatchiks in power long enough after 1989 to allow them to seize all economic advantages.⁷⁹ All these widespread perceptions entitled almost everyone to claim the status of victim, while collectively blaming the Securitate for all wrongdoings under communism and even afterwards. Moreover, as it was perceived to have been above everyone and everything, even above the Romanian Communist Party, its employees and collaborators were placed at the top of the list of wrongdoers. Thus, to this day, the only form of lustration that was finally applied in Romania targeted the Securitate rather than the party.⁸⁰ However, this process acquired momentum only late in the transition, in spite of pressure applied by civil society groups and political parties which claimed to be anticommunist. Legislation designed to open the institution’s archives and disclose its network of collaborators was adopted after the “electoral revolution” of 1996, which caused the former *nomenklatura* members to finally lose political control. Although former political prisoners held key positions in the new ruling coalition, a relevant law was passed by parliament only in 1999, after fierce debates and successive modifications. Moreover, it had no effect for years, as it was only in late 2005 and early 2006 that the archives of the former secret police were entrusted to the institution empowered

⁷⁷ The post-1989 memoirs of some former *nomenklatura* members perpetuated this interpretation. See Rodica Chelaru, *Culpe care nu se uită: Convorbiri cu Corneliu Burtică* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2001), 178–79. Others have confirmed that the Securitate constantly reported back to the party leaders, and certainly to Ceaușescu and his wife. See the memoirs of Ceaușescu’s last chancellery head, Silviu Curticeanu, *Mărturia unei istorii trăite: Imagini suprapuse* (Bucharest: Albatros, 2000), 168–69.

⁷⁸ This thesis is fully or partially embraced by the majority of specialists of the Romanian revolution. See Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *Istoria loviturilor de stat din România, Vol. 4: Revoluția din decembrie 1989—O tragedie românească*, 2 parts (Bucharest: Rao, 2004–2005).

⁷⁹ This is the central argument in Marius Oprea, *Moștenirea Securității* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2004).

⁸⁰ Dragoș Petrescu, “Dilemmas of Transitional Justice in Post-1989 Romania,” in *Lustration and Consolidation of Democracy and the Rule of Law in Central and Eastern Europe*, ed. Vladimira Dvorakova and Andelko Milardovic (Zagreb: Political Science Research Center, 2007), 127–51.

to apply the law in order to remove all the remnants of the former informative network from the public sector and make the documents available for research.⁸¹

As long as the files of the Securitate were not open, those interested in the communist past focused on the victims and their recollections. The drive to recuperate such autobiographical memories, as well as the organization of memory-based public representations were shaped by the belief in the omnipotence of the secret police and claims to innocence and suffering. The focus was on the early period of terror, while the remaining period was covered only to the extent that it illustrated people's fear of the secret police or the misery of everyday life, which members of the Securitate did not share. The totalitarian paradigm provided an interpretative model. Accordingly, after 1989, history and memory produced and reproduced a hegemonic representation of the communist past in which only two mutually exclusive groups exist: "us" (the majority who claimed to have been victims of the regime) and "them" (the tiny group of perpetrators and profiteers, the highest rank of which were the former officers and collaborators of the Securitate). This dichotomic model might be applied to earlier periods of communism, when the regime consolidated its power by means of repression. However, once control was no longer assured by terror, but by the everyday participation of ordinary citizens in extensive networks of collaboration with the secret police, this model becomes inadequate. As long as the files of the Securitate were inaccessible, this clear-cut societal cleavage was considered relevant not only for the entire communist, but also for the post-communist period, for it shaped the political spectrum. Moreover, the consistency of each of the two opposing groups before and after 1989, where anti-communists faced men of the former regime, was taken for granted.

The opening of the Securitate files has broadened the knowledge of Romanian communism, but it has perturbed the dynamics of its remembering. As far as the study of the recent past, in general, and of the Securitate, in particular, are

⁸¹ The Law for the Access to the Personal File and the Disclosure of the Former Secret Police as Political Police, no. 187/1999, is mostly known as the "Ticu Law," after its main proponent, the former senator of the National Peasant Party and president of AFDPR, Constantin Ticu Dumitrescu. A new institution, the Consiliul Național pentru Studierea Arhivelor Securității (CNSAS; National council for the study of the Securitate archives) took over the files of the former secret police. Its function is threefold: as an investigative agency, a public archive, and a research institute. For Law 187/1999, see *Monitorul Oficial al României* 603, 9 December 1999, 1–5. In January 2008, the Romanian Constitutional Court declared this law unconstitutional, so institutional continuity of CNSAS was assured by Governmental Emergency Ordinance 1/2008. Both legal texts were published in *Monitorul Oficial al României* 95, 6 February 2008, 2–10. The subsequent Governmental Ordinance 24/2008 regulated the functioning of the CNSAS until the parliament issued Law 293/2008, which took into account these executive decisions, while introducing other changes (*Monitorul Oficial al României* 182, 10 March 2008, 2–10, and 800, 28 November 2008, 1–4).

concerned, the documents in such an archive consistently provide evidence for issues that are already known in theory and apply to all countries of the former Soviet bloc. These files also provide sources for studying the methods employed by such institutions in order to destroy nuclei of opposition, maintain surveillance of all categories of potential “enemies,” and control populations by turning part of them into collaborators.⁸² Comparatively, it can be inferred from the Securitate documents that the Romanian secret police worked in a very similar manner to its partner institutions, since they were all modeled on the KGB.⁸³ Only the motivations for collaboration differ, for these reflected the cultural values or social norms of behavior in different national milieus. What the Securitate archives could not reveal was the exact number of those who collaborated at a given time. Thus, a meaningful comparison with the networks of informants in other former communist countries cannot be properly made.⁸⁴ At the same time, contrary to widespread belief, the archives of the Securitate have shattered the conviction that this institution was above the control of the party. On the contrary, the way in which documents issued by the secret police were handled within the vast communist bureaucracy indicate that, on all levels, from local to national, the chain of command was from the Communist Party to the Securitate.⁸⁵ Otherwise, these files confirm that the intrusion of this institution into the daily lives of Romanians was indeed extensive.

These are fascinating issues for students of communism. By contrast, the general public is more interested in the names of the secret collaborators, which the media often uses to launch its own witch hunts. Many regrettable mistakes, with sad consequences for the individuals involved, have been made throughout the former communist bloc because of literal readings of secret police files.⁸⁶

⁸² Mary Fulbrook uses the term “participatory dictatorship” to define the consensual collaboration with institutions such as the secret police, which were meant not to construct communism, but to destroy those who might have been against it. Mary Fulbrook, *The People’s State: East German Society from Hitler to Honecker* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2005), 235–90.

⁸³ Cristina Anisescu, Silviu Moldovan, and Mirela Matiu, eds., *“Partiturile” Securității: Directive, ordini, instrucțiuni, 1947–1987* (Bucharest: Nemira, 2007).

⁸⁴ The Securitate files indicate the total number of those involved in the informative network during the forty-five years of communism at 486 thousand individuals. However, it is impossible to establish how many were active at a given time (CNSAS, *Arhivele Securității* [Bucharest: Pro Historia, 2002], 35–36).

⁸⁵ The fact that informative notes made by the Securitate for Ceaușescu were never found in the archives suggests a very different viewpoint, as Vladimir Tismăneanu observed in *Balul mascat: Un dialog cu Mircea Mihăieș* (Iași: Polirom, 1996), 27.

⁸⁶ See Aviezer Tucker, “Paranoids May Be Persecuted: Post-Totalitarian Transitional Justice,” in *Retribution and Reparation in the Transition to Democracy*, ed. Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 181–238. More recently, the Lech Wałęsa case in Poland illustrates that it is not possible to distinguish between victims and perpetrators by relying solely on the files of the secret police.

All such archives, including those of the Securitate, represent a form of memory that is highly subjective and implicitly problematic when used in isolation. This does not mean that the files are only sources of errors. If this had been the case, the incriminating institutions could not have functioned. However, nonprofessionals often ignore the simple fact that documents from secret police archives represent merely the perspectives of the officer and the informant, which not only diverge from that of the victim, but also frequently conflict with each other.⁸⁷ It goes without saying that each case should be treated differently, as responsibilities for past deeds are judged individually and upon sound evidence in societies that respect the rule of law. In Romania, however, as in other former communist countries, the process of transitional justice was staged in the mass media before it arrived at the courts, for the systematic scrutiny of the files disclosed a number of unexpected former collaborators. Otherwise, the archives of the Securitate made it clear that intrusion into the privacy of Romanians was not only more extensive, but also more perverse, than had previously been believed. When selecting collaborators, the secret police systematically and irreversibly blurred the line between victims and perpetrators. For instance, the files revealed that the Securitate coerced even some former political prisoners (though not all) to turn into collaborators after being released. The files also confirmed that the strategy to attract gifted intellectuals was indeed successful. Thus, moral conduct and professionalism before and after 1989 were proven to diverge more often than had been presumed. Briefly put, the opening of these files has challenged the dichotomic and monopolizing narrative about communism that had been constructed since 1989.

As a reaction, some former collaborators devised various strategies of defense, involving different ways of remembering their relations with this infamous institution. While the archives illustrated the means by which informers were recruited, ranging from blackmail to trade-offs, the confessions attempted to hide the reasons for acceptance, ranging from fear to careerism. When remembering their recruitment, some claimed that their collaboration was strictly an act of patriotic duty, as it involved spying only on suspicious foreigners. Others maintained that the information given was harmless.⁸⁸ Finally, some

⁸⁷ The difference between informants' or officers' notes about the daily activities of an observed individual and the everyday notes of the same individual provide an interesting comparison. The diary of the dissident writer Stelian Tănase and his Securitate file are a case in point. The difference between the two versions lies less in the recorded facts, but in the very purpose of narrating that past. See Stelian Tănase, *Acasă se vorbește în șoaptă: Dosar & Jurnal din anii tîrzii ai dictaturii* (Bucharest: Compania, 2002).

⁸⁸ In reaction to these two types of arguments, the philosopher Gabriel Liiceanu published two open and critical letters: "Talentata doamnă Muscă sau despre minciuna în extaz," *Cotidianul*, 15 August 2006, 6–7, and "Umbra părintelui Marchiș la Cozia," *Cotidianul*, 4 September 2006, 5.

argued that any informant was also a victim, for such institutions controlled its own collaborators by putting them under surveillance.⁸⁹ All these arguments represent forms of manipulative memory, destined to obscure another important revelation of the Securitate files that contradicted yet another commonplace: any person could have said no instead of becoming an informant, without suffering any consequences. In a nutshell, contrary to the belief that no one could oppose the Securitate, the documents showed that collaboration was certainly not compulsory.⁹⁰ Finally, public debate was stirred precisely by cases of people who claimed to have been among “us,” in the camp of the anticommunists, whereas the files of the secret police revealed that they were in fact “sources” of information. More explicitly, the documents illustrated that the postcommunist group of anticommunists was neither homogenous nor congruent with the group of people who, if not opposed to communism before 1989, at least refrained from supporting it. While the network of Securitate informants remained unknown, all agreed that individuals who collaborated with an infamous institution are morally culpable and should be socially excluded. Once such individuals had been identified, opinions gradually diverged. Some considered that the entire process of revealing the identity of informants was yet another manipulation of the Securitate, which made available only the files of those it wanted to transform into victims of the postcommunist witch hunt. Others argued that a revelation that seemed to be selective rather than extensive was merely the result of a politically motivated settling of accounts. Still others who wanted to defend the collaborators emphasized that guilt must be judged taking into account the entire life and work of that individual, not only the issue of collaboration.⁹¹

Among the few people who dissented publicly before 1989 (genuine anti-communists in contrast to those who displayed such a stance only after 1989),

⁸⁹ Sorin Antohi, “Poliție politică: Cele două fețe ale turnătoriei,” in *Cum era?... Cam așa: Amintiri din anii comunismului (românesc)*, ed. Călin-Andrei Mihăilescu (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2006), 138–46.

⁹⁰ Mihai Albu, *Informatorul: Studiu asupra colaborării cu Securitatea* (Iași: Polirom, 2008).

⁹¹ The case that stirred most controversy was that of the novelist Nicolae Breban, one of the best-known writers, a champion of the “resistance through culture,” and an alleged opponent of Ceaușescu’s cultural policies. When the latter launched his “theses of July” in 1971, Breban was in Paris and gave a critical interview to *Le Monde*. Once his collaboration with the Securitate became public, several literary critics and journalists defended him, stirring a debate which echoed the controversy about the relation between artistic creativity and moral conduct. The debate was published as “Scriitorii și Securitatea,” *Observatorul Cultural* 574, 13 May 2011, http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Scriitorii-si-Securitatea*articleID_25307-articles_details.html. A different critical approach to the possibility of writing something worthwhile on the basis of the experience of collaboration (implicitly questioning the validity of “resistance through culture”) is expressed in Horațiu Pepine, “Nicolae Breban și cărțile bolnave,” *Deutsche Welle*, 7 April 2011, <http://www.dw.de/dw/article/0,,6496841,00.html>.

none was proven to have collaborated with the secret police. The former informers belonged to all social groups and political persuasions, while the astonishing revelations generally concerned people who claimed to have “resisted through culture,” some of whom were well-known professionals.⁹² These individuals entertained the idea of being committed to creating genuine art or literature, as if communism did not exist, and thereby escaping the control of the party-state. In other words, such individuals argued that the simple refusal to write according to the ideological guidelines of the party represented a way of limiting the influence of the regime upon people’s minds and an implicit expression of anticommunism. Moreover, this was considered the only possible antiregime reaction in a dictatorship like Ceaușescu’s, which relied on the powerful and merciless Securitate. Whereas before 1989 their anticommunism was implicit, after 1989 many emerged as staunch anticommunists. Their approach reinforced the dominant narrative about communism, which maintained that the regime imposed sufferings on a mass of innocent individuals. Their problematic relations with their own pasts did not discredit the anticommunist narrative, which was based on testimonies of genuine victims and heroes. However, such individuals demonstrated that anticommunism, which represented the ethos of postcommunist civil society, as well as the stance that shaped reconstructions of the communist past, in fact amounted to a stereotypical attitude. With reference to the work of Tzvetan Todorov, one could argue that their attitude toward the dictatorial past reflects moral correctness, a code of verbal conduct that epitomizes public conformism.⁹³ When applied to the way in which the traumatic past is remembered, moral correctness has a therapeutic dimension; commemorating victims, celebrating heroes and searching for perpetrators are fundamental to any process of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Anything else would be ap-

⁹² Such revelations were often controversial. An interesting case is that of the late Adrian Marino, a former political prisoner and well known figure in the field of comparative literature. While he was one of the few genuine “free-floating” intellectuals who survived under communism without state employment, he also succeeded in publishing some of his works abroad. Conventional wisdom suggests that he could not have traveled in Western countries without the approval of the Securitate and the implicit urge to collaborate with it. His file shows that Securitate officers continuously urged him to collaborate, but there is no proof that he gave any information. His alleged collaboration made headlines posthumously and provoked fierce controversy. See Mirela Corlățean, “A doua moarte a lui Marino,” *Evenimentul zilei*, 6 May 2010, <http://www.evz.ro/detalii/stiri/editorialul-evz-a-doua-moarte-a-lui-marino-894177.html>. Several people defended Marino by emphasizing that the Securitate did not interfere in his professional writings. See “Vom scrie altfel despre Marino?,” *Observatorul Cultural* 523, 7 May 2010, http://www.observatorcultural.ro/Vom-scrie-altfel-despre-Adrian-Marino*articleID_23632-articles_details.html. His posthumously published memoirs mention nothing about encounters with the Securitate. See Adrian Marino, *Viața unui om singur* (Iași: Polirom, 2010).

⁹³ Tzvetan Todorov, *Hope and Memory: Reflections on the Twentieth Century* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003), 187–97.

palling. At the same time, moral correctness should be accompanied by genuine reflection and honest admission of guilt. Without it, the process of coming to terms with that past remains incomplete, as responsibilities are not assumed, but transferred to a convenient and undefined community of “them.” The Romanian way of dealing with communism after 1989 involved much public display of anticommunism, but only a few attempts to genuinely acknowledge the past. Crimes were condemned, while sufferings and heroism remembered. However, in this process, which constantly tried to separate victims and heroes from perpetrators, the very definitions of these categories (too general to enable us to work through a problematic past) have remained vague and therefore controversial.

20. Daily Life and Surveillance in the 1970s and 1980s

Smaranda Vultur

I took an interest in the theme of Securitate surveillance of our lives a short while after this institution's archives were opened to the public, in 2001, I believe. I saw my own file, which was started in January 1989, and I realized that the frequent out-of-order telephone lines at the time made sense now, and that the technician who would come to repair the device most likely replaced one microphone with another. Although it was not very bulky—it had only thirty-nine pages—the file told me something about the practices of surveillance and about the omissions and limitations of the documents. The phone conversation records were missing, though the surveillance report mentioned them, so I was not to know the exact source of the denunciation, which had transformed me into an “object”¹ or the identity of those who had reported on me.

Authorized as a Securitate archive researcher in 2004, in relation to a project about the collectivization of Romanian agriculture coordinated by Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, I had access to the files of the former Bărăgan deportees I had already interviewed in 1991–2000, containing their life stories. Thus, I was able to compare their stories, recorded in 1991–2000, with the information about them in the weekly entries provided by the officers who kept them under surveillance in 1951. This comparison was useful in two ways. On the one hand, it offered a glimpse of the victims' discourse in relation to the officer's discourse. On the other hand, it helped me understand the complexity of surveillance and the victims' complete lack of awareness of the situation. In the course of research, I also discovered my grandfather's name in the report of an Argeş high official, who presented him as an opponent of collectivization who was, consequently, to be placed under surveillance. I spent the most wonderful holidays of my childhood in the village where my grandfather had been a priest for fifty-seven years. When I read his surveillance file, which had no fewer than 800 pages, I realized what a nightmare this period (1953–1962) had

¹ The technical word used by the Securitate is “target.”

been for my grandfather and my grandmother and what pains they had taken to make my childhood a small heaven on earth. I realized how obstinately I had been kept away from these things. I remembered having heard vague hints at the situation (my grandfather was declared a kulak, he risked being arrested several times, and he was also suspicious because he had been a supporter of the Liberal Party before 1944) but I was never told anything explicitly, although my grandfather remained under surveillance until he died, in 1981. His four sons, all of them intellectuals, had built more or less successful careers until the 1980s, even if each had suffered, between 1945 and 1964, the consequences of their father's "bad" file, which was, every now and then, used as blackmail. I was impressed that my grandfather himself had grown more serene about the regime in his last years, because of his sons' success, which was defined in terms of having a family, an apartment, a car, and, of course, social prestige. I was puzzled by his attitude, but I associated it with my father's own reserve and fear, caused by the conflicts I had with my employers in the 1980s, and with his advice to stay out of political involvement and communist criticism in the troubled early 1990s, as he still thought there was danger for those who opposed the system. I was, thus, curious to find out the explanation for these fears, which I had been taught to feel and which I was determined to resist, even to my own detriment.

Therefore, the interest I took in the topic of memory seems to derive, in light of my research and reflection, from the need to atone for all the ignorance, lack of interest, and exasperation I had experienced when looking at a history that was far more my own and my family's than I could have imagined. The guilt I felt because I had accepted, as an ignorant student, to become a Communist Party member, was doubled by the realization of the sterility of my internal revolt in the 1980s, which I did not have the courage to pursue with actions, because of constant outside pressure. It was this guilt, I believe, which stirred my intimate interest in the theme of this study. It came as an effort to sort things out with myself and, perhaps, to make it up for the past silence, lifeless and belated though it was, when I accepted to become an expert in the board coordinated by Vladimir Tismăneanu, the board that presented the communist dictatorship assessment report.

Language as a Force That Shapes and Reshapes Reality

Anyone who enters the dim and obscure realm of the Securitate's surveillance files, whether (s)he deals with the pursuit and observation of individuals or of entire collectivities, will encounter a number of surprises. I have repeatedly undertaken a series of studies at the National Council for the Study of the Securitate Files, in which I have explored the collectivization and deportation that

resulted in the population transfers of the 1950s. Whoever embarks on such a journey by reading these files finds him- or herself compelled to become accustomed to a particular type of language that has the power to impose its own ideology as if it were a new and singular reality. This places a barrier between facts and the way they are rendered in files. Thus the language of the files imposes a certain mould on the world, one that reshapes the world and changes its size and nature in order to make it fit the new ideology of the age. This language also reduces the complexity of the real world and makes everything in the world fit incriminatory labels; it selects and interprets facts, filtering them through a narrow grid that classifies people as those who were or were not “class enemies,” during the 1950s and the 1960s, for instance, or as “foreigners suspected” of being traitors, or as “those who have a hostile attitude toward the realities in our country,” during the 1970s and the 1980s. Anyone who reads in its entirety an individual surveillance file that spans a period of more than thirty years, such as the case to be studied in this chapter, may notice the way in which this language evolves, and the way in which it seems to echo the changes or the upholding of the objectives or of the ideological line delineated by the Communist Party, or of the catalogue of guilt that this generates. Over time one may also notice successive alterations which the surveillance institutions underwent, that is, changes to the way in which the Securitate functions and to its relationship with the party (“the ruling force”); these alterations also become apparent when one considers the way in which incriminated facts are recorded and how the intensity of the physical and psychological violence is vividly recorded in these files.

In the years that followed its establishment in 1948, the criminal nature of this institution became very apparent. One of the internal investigation files concerning the “kulak problem” contains clear statements about the act of extermination and the way in which the orders were transmitted and responsibilities imparted. This is what the Securitate major Mihail Kovacs wrote in his declaration of 6 October 1950:

In July 1949 I was summoned by comrade Colonel Patriciu to the airport from Turda where I received instructions concerning the kulak problem, indicating when and where we had to throw them to the ground and to strike them down [read “to shoot”—A/N] and to report that they wanted to run away or disarm our men. A few days later comrade Lt. Colonel Cutean also arrived; he told me the same thing, that in case the ideological line of our party cannot be implemented, we should take one or two kulaks, shoot them outside the village and then report that they had attacked our men; we were to act in this way since a written order for such an action did not exist and it was only normal that it shouldn’t exist; in these sort of situations we should therefore not make reference to any written order received from a higher authority; instead, we should supply the report and the reasons that led to the shooting. In this precise manner, kulak Coc Mihai from Cianul Mare was investigated and arrested for having been the instigator of a rebellion in that village, following comrade Colonel Patriciu’s verbal order: “Tonight put him in the car, take him outside the village, and throw him to the ground, and

then report that he ran, the scoundrel. You fired and then the following day it was discovered that he had been shot dead.” (ACNSAS, D. 173, 143)²

Moreover, the Major added that “he criticized me for being too mild in our actions, showing us that the class struggle must be severe” (ACNSAS, D. 173, 142). Comrade Colonel Patriciu defends himself in the face of accusations his subordinate made against him, claiming that the latter misled him by putting together a false report and that he never approved shooting *three affluent kulaks*, Trifa Iosif, Andreșel Ioan, and Pom Traian, from Bistra village in Turda County; he admits, however that there was a case in Mureș County where a kulak was shot because

he incited the peasants to rise in protest against the building of an agricultural collective farm and against the harvesting and threshing of crops. This execution was carried out with my prior consent, for which I did not request approval from the central administration. After it happened I reported the case. After this shooting, people’s state of mind in the district changed. This happened this year in July. (ACNSAS, D. 173, 151 from the declaration of 5 October 1950)

In his report of 20 August 1950, Major Kovacs gave a thorough account of the way in which he acted in the case of the three affluent kulaks, but also about how he shot kulak Bihoreanu from Papiu Ilarian village in Turda County (“He encouraged people not to pay the allotment/quota, he had a huge and mighty influence among the masses and he posed problems for the village’s Temporary Committee” (ACNSAS, D. 173, 175) and kulak Leluț Remus from Orosia village in Turda County (who was shot during the night of 3 August 1950, an act that was justified by the fact that “he led a propaganda campaign against the establishment of the GAC, and that he said that he does not want to collaborate with nor support the present regime for he felt oppressed by it” (ACNSAS, D. 175). As a result of the Major’s actions, as he himself reports, the party activists were now able to pursue their campaigns of persuasion, assured that the atmosphere would remain calm (ACNSAS, D. 173, 175). As a result of these campaigns in Orosia village, thirty-seven new members joined the collective farms, while prior to this moment very few members had joined these farms.

This brief insight into the way the Securitate “operated” in the 1950s shows what price people had to pay for collectivization³ and for the so-called “ap-

² All the files quoted in this study belong to the National Council of the Securitate Record Study Archive (Arhiva Consiliului National de Studiere a Arhivelor Securitatii [ACNSAS]). The initial letter D refers to the Documentation File while Letter I refers to the Information Fund (which, in this particular case, contains the individual surveillance file). When quoting indirect sources, like the study quoted in the text as Reader (see below), I employed references according to the CNSAS manual of style.

peasement” of the people whose favor the party wanted to win as allies, and whose ideals and needs it claimed to serve. It also reveals how the “triumph of socialism” (the name given to many collective farms of this period) was made possible, how the campaign of persuasion was organized, and what criteria were used to create and identify class enemies. The treatment of the kulak as outlined above demonstrates what kinds of risks were faced in those times by anyone who was labeled as an enemy.

Well into the 1980s and even the 1990s,⁴ the word “kulak” retained these negative connotations in spite of the fact that this word was defined in very loose and varied terms; its meaning changed from one province of the country to another, from one place to another, and even from one period to another. The orthodox priest S. B. from Davidești village, who was placed under surveillance and investigated from 1952, but whose conspiratorial/secret surveillance and investigation continued until his death in February 1981 (an excerpt from his death certificate was the last registered document added to his file), is labeled as a kulak because he owned 3.5 hectares of land, he had a brewer’s copper with which he made plum brandy, he used to extract manganese, and he sold fruit. The stigma of having been labeled as a kulak clung to him for a very long time even after he had been “reintegrated” as a “well-to-do peasant” (a term that also reveals the way in which society was evolving), for the term kulak refers to a certain type of “enemy,” and to people who are suspicious of “hostile attitudes” and “inimical displays.” In the age of the collectivization, it was said that he “lead(s) a propaganda campaign against the socialist transformations of the country,” and advised people in his village (including the Securitate informers who lived there or among his friends and neighbors) against joining the collectivity/collective farms in the hope that this would ensure that the farms would not be established. Later on, he tried to withdraw from the CAP, and thereby set a bad example for others, and was subjected to a process of verification (File no. 812, 21 November 1958, ACNSAS, I. 157/123/1, 3), which resulted in the creation of his surveillance file (“individual informative action” no 1035, initiated on 10 February 1961, ACNSAS, I. 157/123/1, 4, a decision that was signed

³ In the report about the actions taken to reestablish order in the restless and rebellious regions of Arad, Bihor, and Sălaj Counties from 6 August 1949, the MAI (Ministry of Administration and the Interior) mentions that 16 kulaks from Oradea and 12 kulaks from Arad were executed, all of them leaders of rebel movements. From both regions, 300 people were deported to Medgidia in Constanța County; in Oradea 170 persons were arrested and later investigated.

⁴ It was used immediately after 1989 in propaganda aimed against the implementation of reforms by the new communist leaders who were trying to eliminate all opposition. The recycling of such labels is proof of the attempt to consider the 1989 revolution as a mere revival of the class struggle. In fact, words like “tranquility” and “appeasement” were used in large numbers in the electoral propaganda of the 1990s, in a climate in which the violence culminated with the miners’ uprisings of 1990 and 1991.

by the Securitate head Tănase Marin and by Securitate lieutenant Barbu Nicolae from the Pitești district headquarters. This file was completed and closed only after his death at the age of eighty-two. The reasons given for putting him under surveillance were that he was an advocate of liberal politics whose activities began in 1926 when he was the leader of the village's liberal organization; he was, moreover, mayor of the village for a year and generally had a lot of influence in public.

The first reason given for putting him under surveillance was of a political nature, and applied very broadly. All members of the former historical parties (not only those which upheld a fascist or legionary doctrine) and all "formers" (exploiters, bourgeois, land owners, plant owners, store owners, cinema owners, and people whose property was expropriated and who were forced to move to different parts of the country) were all allocated a problematic file. In one of these files, concerning the collectivization in the Argeș County, priest S. B.'s name is mentioned as a "reluctant element"; the file also contains a note implying that he was also allocated an individual surveillance file—a fact that suggests that the situation was under control, that is, under the control of the Securitate.

After the political amnesty of 1964, such surveillance actions increased, and came to include all "elements" belonging to the "formers" class. A suspicious policy transformed all of them, without exception, into a virtual inimical class. This policy is characteristic of the Securitate's activity up until the late 1980s. Moreover, "guilt," whether imaginary or real, is not prescriptive but cumulative, and may be passed on to descendants. This "stain" is mentioned under the column "antecedents" throughout the surveillance. Such "marks" can also be found in the files of informers who were recruited by means of blackmail.

As already mentioned, priest S. B. was not an isolated case. S. Gh. (born 1911) from Comloșu Mare (Banat) led a political activity that favored peasants, was deported to Bărgan from 1951 to 1956, arrested in 1959 by the Securitate together with four other men who lived in the same village, and sentenced in March 1960 to ten years of forced labor for having "plotted against the social order." When he was freed, following the 766/1964 decree, he was immediately put under surveillance (ACNSAS, I. 4973/1, f. 1). A report by the Timiș County Securitate inspectorate, signed by Major Chita Gheorghe on 23 September 1972, mentions that he is "a vicious/perverse element that lies awaiting"; it also mentions that he had been sentenced in 1960 for "subversive activity against the state." (ACNSAS, I. 4973/3, f. 1). The difference between the way in which the reason for his detention was formulated in 1959 and the statement of 1972 is highly significant. In 1975 the informer or "the Widow" (in a note from 15 June, ACNSAS, I. 4973/3, f. 31) reports to the Securitate apparatus that S. Gh. "is always dissatisfied with our country's achievements" (which could be understood from the fact that he had said that "we can no longer compete with

other countries, that we no longer make quality merchandise, that we have a lot of debts"). In 1980 and in the following years (until S. Gh.'s death), the same informer ("the Widow" in his note of 8 May 1983), as well as others, reported that the surveyed man was old and sick, that "he no longer makes hostile affirmations about the state, that he hardly ever talks to anyone and that no one listens to what he says anymore" (ACNSAS, I. 4973/3, f. 3). The officer who wrote this note mentions again that "he was sentenced for hostile discussions against the party," and thereby implies more explicitly than in the other two former cases (by using the label "inimical") that he expressed remarks that were critical of the party.

In addition to the above remarks, it is worth mentioning that fathers who had been political prisoners (as in the case of S. Gh.), and fathers who were priests with liberal views who had been labeled as kulaks (as in the case of S. B.) left a black stain on their children's files. The children's origins had a decisive influence on their social, educational, or professional destiny, at least in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ This principle of collective stigma governed the ideology of class struggle, as well as the logic of the Communist Party, which was concerned not only about those who fought the regime openly, but also about those who might do so, on account of the environment in which they had lived or the education they had received. In the 1980s, following the ideological revival in the wake of Ceaușescu's Theses of July 1971, one needed the party's consent in order to begin studying toward a doctorate even if one was not a party member. However, it was impossible to obtain such consent if the candidate's parents were members of the "formers" class (bourgeois, landowners, political detainees).

Dangerous Liaisons

One of the most alarming aspects of the file containing documents about the check I was subjected to from 27 January 1989 to 26 August 1989⁶ was that it included reports from the Securitate regarding the people with whom I was corresponding. The simple fact that I had written to them during the check meant

⁵ One file suggests that, if the person who was put under surveillance was no longer in the country (the note referred to a former Jewish proprietor), or if that person was no longer alive, his or her children should be placed under surveillance.

⁶ This is the date on which it was decided that the checking action should stop and that no surveillance file was necessary (ACNSAS, I. 2742, 33–34). However, the negative conclusions of the check were sent to the party. The check itself was initiated as a result of a report from source "S" (correspondence), where certain "hostile actions against the realities of our country" were mentioned (ACNSAS, I. 2742, 1). Somebody added with a pen in different colored ink on the page signed by Lt. Maj. Galea M. that "she has a brother-in-law who left the country illegally and lives in Sweden." My brother-in-law had emigrated the previous year (ibid.)

that they were also checked. Among them was a person who provided accommodation for me in 1988 during my holidays in Sucevița, a renowned literary critic from Cluj, two academics from the University of Bucharest who were my friends, a childhood friend (at that time an editor for Deutsche Welle), a writer who was an editor for Cartea Românească and who was reported to have published “books praised by the Free Europe radio station” (which was an incriminating element).

In the action plan that the Securitate devised for me on 27 January 1989, the first task was to “clearly establish the relations of the target and the nature of these relations” as a preventive measure (“to prevent her from engaging in hostile actions against the policy of our party and state”). Thus, the source “Sorin” (who proved to be a former head of a department from the research center within the university where I was working at the time) was recommended to establish “the nature of the relations that the target Vanda entertained with Paula.” “Vanda” was my name in the file, while “Paula” was a colleague of mine who was “under surveillance for maintaining relations with foreigners who had a hostile attitude toward our country” (ACNSAS, I. 2742, 5). She was the only person who was mentioned specifically, which is why more information about our relationship is probably to be found in her file. She was an active participant in the Romanian Revolution of 1989 from Timișoara and later emigrated to the USA. While we worked together she was investigated at least once by the Securitate at the university. I know of this unpleasant event as she told me about it herself. On that day she asked me to wait for her at the university in order to make sure that she would leave the institution unharmed.

During the 1980s the Securitate became much more interested in the relations between Romanians and all foreigners, not only with “hostile” foreigners who were themselves under surveillance. A law from the 1970s banned any relations with foreigners and in particular relations about which the Militia was not informed, especially if the foreigner was staying at one’s home. We avoided such situations in order to avoid being asked to provide a declaration or being accused of having failed to obtain permission. The note which ends the check made on my in 1989 (ACNSAS, I. 2742, 32) mentions the incriminating fact that my husband and I maintained “*unofficial* relations” (my emphasis) “with foreigners and had connections with the French Library in Bucharest.”

The French Library was situated on Dacia Avenue, where it still stands. It was no secret that I went there frequently for the library kept a record of library members and there were informers among the library staff. It was formally forbidden to use the library, and many former users complied with this rule. However, we informed our dean about this, and he thought everything was legal. Libraries were closely monitored (see Caius Dobrescu’s testimony about the American Library). Dobrescu was investigated by the Securitate as a student, with tragic consequences. For intellectuals who were interested in the humani-

ties, libraries provided almost the only connection with recent publications in the West, which is why the ban on using foreign libraries was meant to limit access to information and contacts with foreign diplomats. The head of the French Library allowed books to be returned by post, because she knew about the effects of the ban on teachers and academics.

The fact that someone maintained relations with foreigners represented a cardinal sin and an obsession for the Securitate, which strove to create a buffer against the transfer of information. Information was to no longer travel from the country to the West and vice versa. "Nonintervention in internal affairs" was the inane principle that characterized Romanian foreign policy at that time; the Securitate's job was to make sure that information concerning what happened in Romania over the last two decades of Ceaușescu's rule would never reach the West. In her study about the monitoring of correspondence, Denisa Budeanu notes that drastic measures were taken whenever the Securitate found a breach. This is what a group of adolescents wrote in a letter addressed to Cornel Chiriac, the editor of the music program of Free Europe:

Now, after the famous date of 7 July 1971,⁷ which is to be a day of mourning from now on, the life of the Romanian youth is even worse.

The young men's beards and long hair are gone; the pop, the beat, and the progressive music are also gone. "Everything" is gone. However, certain things are still there: the queues for meat, for food, in general, make life sad.

Why do so many Romanians leave the country without any remorse whenever they get the chance? Because they live well? Obviously not. But who is brave enough to stand up and speak out about all these truths? No one! Because as soon as you open your mouth to say something, they make you shut it. Then the cops shower punches and truncheon blows on you to make you think like a "true communist." We usually approve of what they say, but do as we want, as we think. The only way to get it off our chest, to let off steam, to unburden our sorrow is to write to you, our dear Cornel. You have always been like a father to us. Your words, your shows bring us a freer, better life, a life worth living. So, dear Cornel, allow us to thank you from the bottom of our hearts for what you have done, are doing and will do for us; We = the youth of Romania. ... Document 1–15 October 1971. Excerpt from the letter sent to Cornel Chiriac, Free Europe radio station, by a group from "The Free King's Club." (ACN-SAS, I. 3032, vol. I, 21)⁸

The above letter testifies to the emergence of an "inside foreigner" in the early 1970s. This type of foreigner "wears long hair and a beard," listens to "Free Europe" or to other foreign radio stations, likes pop, rock, beat, and progressive music, is a rebellious youth and has learned that the *double bind* technique is a way of getting away from the Securitate and the Militia. The letter also demonstrates the dichotomy between "we" and "they," characteristic of

⁷ It is the day when Ceaușescu issued his July Theses which reoriented his policy toward ideological control and personality cult (my comment).

⁸ Quoted from Reader, 98.

people who recall the past while seeing themselves either as victims of the oppressive power or as its opponents. Once established, this dichotomy becomes a way of distinguishing and negotiating mutual images which account for the manner in which relations with authority are maintained.

During the 1950s anyone suspected of forming an association leading to joint action that was not programmed by the authorities could be accused of belonging to a "subversive group." In 1951, the priest S. B. was reported for the first time (by junior lieutenant Ghițoiu) to have "organized subversive meetings under the guise of throwing parties" (ACNSAS, I. 157123/1, f. 75). As a consequence, the "group of friends" was subjected to "informative penetration," and one of the members of the group was recruited as an informer "on account of compromising evidence" by means of blackmail and coercion (*ibid.*, 72). After this, each member was subjected to a checking action, even if such checking had already been carried out by the Securitate as a result of a report dating from 1948, in which accusations had been proven false. As a result of the new check, the priest was declared to be "a hostile and dangerous element" and he was arrested on 31 October (*ibid.*, 65). His brother, an officer and former serviceman from Pitești, aroused the suspicion of the Securitate because he paid the priest occasional visits. A year later, in order to demonstrate what hostile activities had been carried out by the priest, new evidence was requested "by order of the Securitate lieutenant N. Pleșiță," who also signed the document of 13 January 1953 (ACNSAS, I. 157 123/1, 60). On 31 October 1952 Pleșiță demanded that S. B. should be sent to a work colony. The information in support of this decision was taken from other investigations undertaken by neighbors or informers. During the 1952 surveillance, but also in 1963, the informers provided reports almost every week. Lists of the priest's presumed political misdemeanors were invented, the most important of which was the priest's alleged hope that the regime would change and that the communists would fall (I. 157123/1, 53–54). In 1963 the agents were ordered to organize meetings with the "target" every ten days. The number of informers increased as a result, such that the priest ran the risk of being arrested or being sent to a forced labor camp, even of disappearing.

The relations between the person under surveillance and his or her professional, social, and chosen environment ("the circle of relations") were constantly analyzed by the Securitate. One of the additional tasks of the informer was to analyze the "target's" social relations. The circle of friends was to be "penetrated" and "disintegrated" by agents in cases in which it was suspected that the association could generate "hostile" joint actions. In addition to anticipating and investigating such actions, agents had to observe and note the comments people made, the circumstances in which they were made, and especially whether these comments were unfavorable for the party and state leadership. This type of surveillance and action affected such a large number of people that

its effects bordered on paranoia. The priest S. B.'s four surveillance files contain reports by dozens of informers. "Costică Marin," the most persevering and spiteful informer, was his neighbor who paid him regular visits; he could talk to the priest and make him say all kinds of things in the most natural way. He did this for an extended period alongside the informer "Ion Dobre" who, when the priest was old and sick, even reported that the priest was afraid of dying. This was obviously a way of saying that the enemy was no longer a threat, and that the informer himself had perhaps grown tired of reporting about the priest; however, it also proves that people's most intimate feelings become the property of those who received the information. Dana Iamandi, a young CNSAS researcher, said that "it was the spirit of the age: a nationalization of personal life—when 'private' property became 'state' property, a 'common' asset."

B. G.'s surveillance file contains his daughter's (M.) intercepted letters. She wrote to her friend in Bucharest (I. 161 787, 68–81) in 1972 and received letters from him. The officer mentions that this is "an extract from an erotic text," and that the passages from this letter were recorded because the young woman was probably considering suicide as a result of abuses meted out by the authorities (such as the removal of two fellow students because they were frequenting the Flora bar and terrace in Timișoara, which happened to be popular with foreigners, or the removal of female friends who were in contact with Italians). The young woman wanted to be free, while the young man told her that she could set her spirit free (*ibid.*, 68). We also learn that they are both fans of the American singer-songwriter Jim Morrison and that they supported the hippie movement (like many other youngsters of their generation). This information drew the attention of the Securitate, especially because the young man was already being observed by the central office of the Securitate. In a note from an informer who had been her friend in high school and in a rather long love letter that had been photocopied and attached to the file, M. appears to be an educated young woman with academic and artistic interests. As in so many other cases, these files paint an approximate portrait whose malevolence varies in degree according to the identity of the informer and his or her relationship with the observed individual during the surveillance period. They open a door—sometimes subtly, sometimes quite conspicuously—onto the world of the past. In this case, what two teenagers in love would write to each other about what their lives were like, what they did in their free time, what the atmosphere was like in their school and town (which, in the Securitate jargon, would be called the "state of mind" of the observed individuals), and what opinions and thoughts they had.

I know people who were observed in the 1970s and 1980s and who, after seeing their files, refused to divulge the names of those who had informed the Securitate on them because they considered the information in the file harmless. In cases in which the consequences of the surveillance proved, retrospectively,

not to be serious, the former victim is sometimes grateful to the informer (a colleague, friend, or neighbor, for example) who had tried to protect them rather than getting them into trouble with the authorities. Other people are reluctant to divulge the name of the informer because they do not want to repeat the latter's gesture of public denunciation. Some people even feel guilty for not having been vigilant enough, for having blindly trusted their friends or not having chosen them with caution. An embittered smile, irony and even mockery are quite frequent reactions to such discoveries, often followed by revolt and disappointment. When preparing this study, I read two written testimonies, one by the writer Bujor Nedelcovici—*Tigrul de hârtie*⁹ (The paper tiger)—the other by the journalist Neculai Munteanu, a former editor of a movie magazine in Bucharest, who was then a reporter for Radio Free Europe.¹⁰ Their writings show that the experience of facing one's own file occasioned a dialogue with the self, a close examination of inner debates triggered by the resurgence of one's own past.

In these texts, as well as in interviews I conducted with people who had seen their files, the Securitate's notes become an object of reconstruction leading one to explore inaccuracies and voids in one's memory, to correct sources' and officers' notes, and to add details which help us to better understand the context in which things happened. Such facts are not only unintelligible, but can become what David Löwenthal calls a "foreign country," for those who are not familiar with the role played by the Securitate in the system of power, and with the working methods and obsessions of the party. One could argue that the very language in which facts are defined makes it difficult to understand them. Moreover, the process of depriving observed individuals of their personality, calling them a "target" or an "element," alienates them as human beings.

The broad range of emotions experienced by those who saw their files corresponds to the corrections they have to make to their pasts. By rationalizing the past, they become detectives in search of a coherent set of facts to remember and a series of arguments which make it easier to understand the values upheld by the society they lived in. While exploring the issue of collectivization in a village in the Banat highlands, I started by reading a regional archive in which two files from the village had been misplaced during the chaotic year of 1989. While reading the bulky files containing weekly reports about observed individuals, I was overcome by an irrational sense of fear and guilt, as if I had entered forbidden territory. After only one day in the archive, I was already familiar with a number of village "characters" whom I was about to meet face to face during my field research.

⁹ Nedelcovici, Bujor. "Un tigrul de hârtie. Eu, Nica și securitatea," in *Opere complete*, ed. idem (București: Editura ALLFA, 2008), vol. 7, 9–356.

¹⁰ Neculai Constantin Munteanu, *Ultimii șapte ani de acasă. Un ziarist în dosarele Securității* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2007).

The World within the Files

A breach in this alienating system is occasionally brought about when informers' reports include extremely concrete details about the life of the person under surveillance, including his or her daily routine. The priest S. B., for instance, goes to the church where he serves, sets up a church choir with the village youth,¹¹ repairs the fence of the cemetery, mows the grass in the churchyard, makes comments about whatever has happened at the GAC (collective farm) or to the members of the communist village council. He crosses the center of the village while talking to a neighbor (an informer who had unfortunately been instructed to provoke certain types of discussions) with whom he talks about national and international politics reported in the news (the death of John F. Kennedy, Nixon's visit to Romania, Ceaușescu's visits to other countries¹² the confrontations between Americans and Russians during the Cold War). He is dissatisfied with the functioning of the village shop, the lack of bread, and all kind of abuses that he notices.

He goes to Pitești to attend the meetings of the priests in the diocese to which he belongs (whereupon at least two of these priests report on their discussions with him); he uproots the trees in the orchard he is forced to give up for "amalgamation";¹³ he goes to a spa because he suffers from rheumatism and is happy with the medical care he receives there; he helps one of his sons to buy a car (a "luxury car," according to the "source"); and he is worried about the frequency of church going and disapproves of the official decision that people should work on Sundays and on important religious holidays. An accident happens at the petrochemical works in Pitești at Easter; he thinks that it is a form of divine punishment and blames it on people's lack of faith and on the Communist Party's atheist policy. He is concerned about the money he makes and about the fate of his children who he has to support financially during their schoolings; and in the 1980s he is pleased that they have become "important people" appreciated by everybody.

¹¹ While the Securitate accuses him of preventing the youth from carrying out activities organized by the village cultural center.

¹² This is what he said, on 21 March 1974, about the visit made by Ceaușescu to Argentina (as he is provoked by the informer): "Argentina is a rich country where people are very respectful, unlike Romanians. You saw [he addresses the "source"—N/A] how fat their animals are, unlike the ones in our CAP [collective farm] which die every spring and [or—my comment] are made to stand up with a lever."

¹³ Such land amalgamation actions actually involved the seizure of property, which prepared the ground for future collectivization. During the last years of Ceaușescu's rule, the formula "reclamation of land for agricultural purposes" also meant that certain orchards were to be converted into arable land (even if such orchards grew on land unfit for cereal growing); the flowerbeds in front of apartment buildings were also to be converted into vegetable plots.

All these chronological details are taken from reports and enable those reading them to recollect similar personal situations. They provoke reflections about the degree to which our life and times were controlled, but also show how the person under surveillance evolved over time, and how he or she related to the regime or even recollected his or her own life.

Until the 1970s, S. B. had been dissatisfied with the regime and its local representatives, and therefore severely criticized the party's political decisions. From the Securitate's point of view he was a recalcitrant and dangerous person, on account of both his past activities and his considerable influence, which lasted until 1979 when he retired. As time passed and S. B. grew older, his criticism of the communists waned, although he did not forget the terror of the 1950s. On 8 July 1973 the informer "Ion Dobre" reported his meeting with the priest who had recently returned from the spa. He asked the priest how he felt as a result of the treatment, and thus reported the priest's reply:

I feel a little better, [but] it's because of the communists that I'm ill, since I used to hide in the woods without any food and with wet clothes; I was constantly afraid of being caught; at night I used to sleep in the houses of people who lived near the woods, because if they [the Securitate] had caught me when they searched for me I wouldn't be alive today [the 1950s–1960s], so, I'm suffering now. (ACNSAS, I. 157 123/4, 50)

A year later, on 25 March 1974, in a dialogue with the same source, the priest mentioned his past again: "It was very hard, they used to chase us, they called us kulaks, they imposed high taxes" (*ibid.*, 39). This time the source not only provoked the priest, but also tried to influence him: "But now we should forget them and overlook whatever happened then." S. B. said

Yes, people live better today, but the troubles we had in the past overwhelmed us and there are still troubles now as there were then, because nothing is as it used to be when I was a respectable priest in the village, and now nobody says that we have a priest in the village, we go to church and preach for only about five or six men and about fifteen women." (*Ibid.*)

In 1980, a few months before the priest's death, several informers ("Relu Radu," "Vrabie," "Nicu Ioan") reported that he was ill and in hospital; he no longer displayed any hostile attitudes, he even praised comrade Ceaușescu on the grounds that he traveled to various countries "to fight for world peace." The sources also mention that S. B. no longer went out to visit people, just as he no longer received any visitors (ACNSAS, I. 157 123/4, 2, 3, 4, 5). Nonetheless, the sergeant recommended that the surveillance related to these "aspects" should continue.

The surveillance operation conducted on Pascu Ioan in 1986 ended in similar fashion. Born in 1905, he appears in Securitate records in July 1962 as a former member of the national Peasants' Party (from 1934 to 1936). He was allegedly hostile toward the Agricultural Association, and in 1985, a few months before

his death, the report claims that he was old and weak, unable to go out, and was visited only by relatives (ACNSAS, I. 72446, vol. I and II, note 5). Similar reports were made in another region of Romania, Comloșu Mare. While the source known as “the Widow” noted, in 1975, that S. Gh. “was always unhappy with our achievements,” in 1978, the source known as “Nelu” declared that S. Gh. “was no longer interested in politics or in criticizing the party’s policy” (ACNSAS, I. 4973/3, 13), and focused instead on gardening and raising his grandson. In 1982, “he stopped going to church, where he used to discuss various problems,¹⁴ he is ailing, suffers from asthma, very rarely goes out, and complains that no one talks to him any more.” The source, a vet who came treat the old man’s pig, noted that “he refused to join a conversation about political topics, even though the source tried to lure him” (I. 4973/3, 9, 7) as instructed.

In such circumstances, where there was no “evidence” of the observed individual’s hostility, the informers operating during the 1980s were usually directed toward other “targets” or problems. Such problems included thieving from farms or from the Agricultural Association, individuals suspected of embezzlement (these were generally individuals who were thinking of moving abroad rather than ones who were embezzling money), malpractice, or agricultural mishaps (which, a few years earlier, would have been regarded as malevolent gossip or antisocial behavior). Irrespective of the target’s age and location, the informers were invariably required to report people’s connections with foreigners, their correspondence with foreign citizens, and the identity of everybody who visited them or talked to them.

It is difficult to judge whether former (real or imaginary) opponents of the regime genuinely (even partially) “converted,” or whether they were simply being more careful about what they said, or even whether the informers were trying to protect them. There were different kinds of informers. Some were gentle and sympathetic, others were zealous and intent on harming their targets and exaggerating their deeds, creating an image of them that corresponded to the Securitate’s expectations. Some informers were spiteful and envious, others were stupid or naive, while still others almost transformed this practice into a perverse hobby. Some informers were talented writers who structured their stories, building up suspense which culminated in incriminating arguments like a sort of a punch line, even though they were based on presuppositions.

Our interpretation of the files is also challenged by the difficulty of knowing to what extent the changes in the behavior and utterances of the observed individual are determined by the effects of the surveillance operation. However, it is clear that the climate of suspicion, fear, and insecurity favored by the Securitate influenced people’s patterns of thinking for many years. This society still af-

¹⁴ He had been arrested and charged with conspiracy together with the other people of the village he had talked to after a religious service.

fects the way in which people think and the way in which they relate to other members of their community even today. Moreover, this climate legitimated treason and the betrayal of friends, as in the case of the source “Moisescu Oprea” who, in a note dated 12 March 1982, informed the Securitate about his friend’s desire to emigrate.¹⁵ It also legitimated the flouting of the principle of hospitality and gratitude, as practiced by those who informed about hosts abroad, and about friends or acquaintances who had offered them shelter. In short, it legitimated lying, simulacra, and the fear of telling the truth.

At the same time, the bravest of those under surveillance were capable of self-censorship and acknowledged the limits of their courage, or they tended to mock their surveillors and entered into a dialogue via the microphones that bugged their rooms. In the face of terror, laughter has always been an effective and liberating weapon. However, a smile often froze on people’s lips once they became the victims of the Securitate.

It is possible to compile an inventory of the human behavior and attitudes that characterized the period depicted in these files by exploring the reactions of people who were bound together as victims and victimizers, or as investigators and the investigated. The figure of the observed surveillor is not uncommon and indicates the extent to which communication was flawed, and to which enmity existed on various levels of authority in the Securitate or between the Securitate and the Communist Party.

Following the end of the period characterized by state terrorism, the Securitate started to be afraid of itself, that is, of what the “party leadership” (Ceașescu and his wife) might learn from the files. It therefore initiated a process of rehabilitation, describing reality in a euphemistic manner. The Brașov revolt, for example, is described in the Securitate files as “hooligans’ events,” anticipating what Ceașescu himself would say, in December 1989, about the Timișoara revolution, which he (somewhat more accurately) described as an “anarchic, oppositional” movement. The evidence given by a writer investigated in August 1988¹⁶ would be almost comical if it were not for the huge pressure and aggressiveness of the classical investigation:

At a certain moment, [because] it was obvious that I had to confess something... I confessed. Yes, I swore at Ceașescu. No, you couldn’t do that,... you couldn’t simply declare that “I swore at Nicolae Ceașescu.” ... You had to rephrase it and say “I insulted the party or the state leadership,” or something like that. (Caius Dobrescu interviewed by Dana Iamandi)

¹⁵ Reader, 60–61. This is an extract from Cristina Anisescu’s notes about the records of ACN-SAS, file no. 6156, vol. 1, note 88. The plan to emigrate was rarely shared with anyone other than the most intimate and trustworthy friends. More often than not, such information was kept secret until the passport had been received or even until the departure had already been prepared.

¹⁶ Reader, 127.

Similar situations arose in the reports of the special “T” unit, which was in charge of observing the messages exchanged by the Romanians with foreign citizens from 1 January 1986 to 15 April 1987.¹⁷ These encoded reports are unintelligible only to those who are aware of the political context of the 1980s. The records mention that, in this period, that,

More than 4,520 foreign citizens staying in Romanian hotels were monitored, resulting in approx. 5,200 reports. Certain people, especially journalists, were noted for their interest in aspects of the social, political, or cultural life in our country, in people’s shopping habits [i.e., the absence of food and the efforts Romanians made to obtain it], in building sites [this was the time when Ceaușescu had a large number of buildings pulled down—S. V.], in the headquarters of various persuasions [i.e., the churches, which were also demolished by Ceaușescu—S. V.]. These foreign citizens use such details deliberately and malevolently in their anticommunist, anti-Romanian propaganda. They also attempt to contact native persons with subversive opinions or specialists in architecture and engineering, who could provide evidence for their malevolent propaganda.

The above text is characteristic of the mechanism of alternate revelation and mystification, which was designed to temper the gravity of the situation by avoiding straightforward language. Caius Dobrescu confesses that he and his roommates realized that they were under surveillance when two of the students were moved to a different room on the campus. After censoring everything they said for a while, they started to exchange jokes with their surveillants, not realizing how serious the situation was. As Caius Dobrescu says,

we included the comrades who were listening to our jokes, we conveyed a message. Everything started one day when Sorin was alone in his room, shivering, and told us how he had stood up all of a sudden and said, “I want to give thanks to the party, in particular to Comrade Nicolae Ceaușescu, for the excellent conditions he has provided for us.” On hearing this, we were so amused that we stopped censoring ourselves. Maybe it upset them that we made fun of them, including them in our big family. They were somehow intimately connected with us and we got used to this idea, in a comic way.... However, they did not seem to enjoy our joke!¹⁸

Caius Dobrescu and his roommates were to realize how serious the situation was during the tough investigation that followed. In an attempt to reconstitute the circumstances in which the investigation took place, Caius Dobrescu remembers that “the shock and the dismay were so great that,”

At a certain moment—he says—I remember they were chasing me around that office, hitting me with the club as hard as they could. In front of a large map of Romania, of the Socialist Republic of Romania, which formed the background of this activity. Well, I can’t say they tortured me, God forbid, we know what the people in the 1950s had been through, their sinis-

¹⁷ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸ Ibid., 85.

ter experiences. Compared to those tortures, what happened to me was a game. But, I assure you, the insider's experience was weird and traumatic, especially since we didn't know where this would stop.¹⁹

Those people who published books about their surveillance file and noted their reactions as they were reading them do not only correct or complete the information in the files. The writer Bujor Nedelcovici shared his feelings and thoughts at the moment when he discovered a nine-page-long epistolary diary that he had tried to send to a friend in France in 1981 with the complicity of his friend N. Manolescu. The letter had been found and confiscated together with other papers and photos at the customs, something that N. M. told B. J. when he returned from Paris twenty-one years later. He found this letter in his file and recorded his reaction as, "Grieved, shocked, enraged ... a muted scream to God.... The 'soul robbers' had infiltrated into the most intimate states of mind, of anxiety and spiritual despair." He concludes that a country in which customs officers and generals can read a personal letter is not a country worth living in or returning to (the writer lived in Paris from 1988).

Conclusion, or on Gorgon's Face

The case of Bujor Nedelcovici testifies to two levels of recollection. On the one hand, there is the world in the files, with their daily records. On the other hand, there is the world of those exploring a world which existed a few decades ago, with a view to remembering and analyzing it. The act of remembering implies an interaction between the two worlds, that is, between the present moment at which the memory is evoked and the past which is being recovered. The character involved in the act of remembering is the link between the two worlds. He lived in the world evoked by the files and was more or less formed by that world. However, he lives today, and the position he adopts when he looks back depends on the angle from which he looks and the role he plays *in* this past and *in connection with* this past. That is why one of the possible endings for this study could be formulated in a first-person narrative in which I offer my own testimony in an attempt to look at myself from the perspective of the past and of the present. This would require a much longer text and would be much more difficult to write. It would probably be a sequel to the analysis I have sketched in this chapter, suggesting various ways in which it could be continued by including my personal recollections. In this case, as in many others, the researcher must maintain a balance between his roles as a detached observer and as someone whose biography is inextricably linked to this period.

¹⁹ Ibid., 126.

In order to maintain this balance between past and present one must first re-define contexts. What is reported by the “sources” and their “targets” (who are ordinary people like us, with a name or a surname) is filtered, as we have seen, by the act of surveillance. Moreover, the reports are signed by officers who conduct the surveillance and have to report back to their superior officers and members of the party apparatus. This communication framework creates a series of distortions because, once named and labeled, realities are given fixed definitions. Moreover, this framework involves several actors and is governed by strict communication rules which secure the way the institution works. It is therefore an integral part of the repressive function of a totalitarian system, as well as one of the keys to reforming this institution. The way in which the institution is perceived by those who come into either close or superficial contact with it offers special insight into the meaning of this past.

When selecting and collating documentation for this chapter, I conceived of communication as an orchestral system, in the spirit of communication anthropology as defined by Yves Winkin, who considers that rules of communication are not fixed and preestablished, but can be inferred by analyzing the “score.” I also took into account the fact that, in the case of surveillance conducted by the Securitate, communication is subject to restrictions and can become a source of guilt. Based on these general premises, I am proposing different ways in which to approach the analyzed material systematically, while considering directions in which further study could be developed.

1. It makes sense to begin by compiling a repertoire of the forms of guilt arising in successive stages of the repressive apparatus by analyzing patterns of thought and action underlying manifestations of guilt and, consequently, punishment.²⁰ Guilt generally arises on the basis of ideologically encoded facts and a broader sense of reality which ensues. I analyzed the relative continuity and discontinuity of these encodings over time and the way in which facts were distorted in order to be made incriminating. In particular, I focused on the way in which “the enemy” was defined at various moments in time, while paying particular attention to the evolving relationship between “the reluctant element” within and the “dangerous foreigner” without, united in their malevolence. I then compared the state of affairs in the 1950s and 1960s with those in the 1970s and 1980s. I also explored the cumulative and indefinable nature of guilt in the Securitate surveillance system and the phenomenon by which guilt spread tribally to other family members and friends. I also investigated the universe of the imaginary enemy and the way in which the holistic approach to surveillance led to an unpredictable expansion of the number of observed individuals and to an increased risk that people would be labeled as undesirable members of the

²⁰ See *ibid.*, 118—the attempt to partially remake such an inventory for the 1970s and the 1980s in Daniela Iamandi.

community. Such research may enable us to understand individuals' relation to power generally, and to measure ensuing risks. A typology of observed people would provide an ideal foundation for such research, which could be further developed by analyzing evidence given by opponents or people gained access to their files after the end of the regime. The analysis should then be carried out on two levels, which illustrate various interactions with the past similar to those outlined in this study of extracts from oral or written testimonies. Emphasis should therefore be placed on the value of a future repertoire of reactions (including emotional ones) and of the contexts in which these reactions were subsequently understood.

2. At the same time, the instructions given by officers to informers show how they defined the problems to be investigated at various stages of the communist era or of the observed individual's biography. They also reveal the extent to which they infringed on private and collective life, with perverse psychological and social effects which shape and reshape society. Again, the approach here was comparative, aiming to assess the Securitate's interest in destroying or infiltrating the milieu. The analysis of concrete situations demonstrates how smaller or larger milieu were controlled and observed, and how interpersonal relations came about in a "world" of surveillance and punishment. A typology of the informers could also prove useful when analyzing human alienation and the relationship between the paralyzed world of negative labels and the perception of the other as a human being. The relationship between the informer and his or her victim during the surveillance period or retrospectively (after reading the file) is another way of understanding the behavior, attitudes, feelings, norms, and values that define a society.

3. In this study I paid special attention to aspects of language that merit close attention, such as the reductionist nature of the language used in the Securitate's files and the way in which this language changed over time; the Securitate's "technical" jargon, which reduced the human being to the status of a dangerous "element" or "target," and the verbal strategies they used when negotiating power, such as encodings, euphemisms, or omissions; in addition to language which reduces and reshapes the world, the files contain fragments of dialogue, personal thoughts, jokes, and conversations which, with the informers' characteristic zeal and naivety, offer insight into private life, revealing the degree to which normality reigned in spite of the political context and type of dictatorship.

Translation by Dana Chetrinescu Percec

21. From Memory to Canon: How Do Bulgarian Historians Remember Communism?

Liliana Deyanova

Immediately after 1989, our past became more and more unpredictable. At the time, I did not realize how accurate this famous phrase would continue to be two decades later. Although I had been working on the problematic of collective memory for some time, I could not have imagined that the efforts of a group of politicians and historians (the European People's Party, Stéphane Courtois, and others), who strove to legalize the formula "communism is a regime more perverse than Nazism" in the process of lobbying for Resolution 1481 of the PACE (January 2006), would not be discussed by Bulgarian historians, researchers of communism, and history teachers. Perhaps also because I was not in Bulgaria at the time, the sharp contrast with Western scholars' responses to the multiplying memory laws, baffled me. And in fact, this provided the immediate occasion for my choice of topic within the collective project. Besides, I had been dealing for a long time with the nonexpert narratives on communism, with the social framework of memory (studies collected primarily in the monograph "Lineaments of Silence: Historical Sociology of Collective Memory"). I still seek to understand the silences in history, forgetting, oblivion. Silences are the narratives that cannot become histories, the stories that do not become History. But oblivion is not the opposite of memory; it is the fate of a story that could not be a memory: so how does this fate come about?

But still, one could ask, what were the reasons that brought me to this theme? Why should a person like me, working on theoretical sociology, suddenly decide to study memory, to collect narratives about the People's Court, the stories of the children of "victims" and "executioners"? I am well aware that any answer, a short one especially, is no doubt a "rationalization" (in Freudian terms), or a "biographical illusion" (in the sense of Pierre Bourdieu, who criticizes the uncritical "story collectors").... Of course, the meaning of the past is happening now. But these meanings are specific "places," and therefore the following story of a specific place in my own memory clarifies, hopefully, something of the history. This "place" is a concrete object: the authentic

hat of the authentically historical German envoy to Bulgaria, Adolf Heinz Beckerle,¹ a hat that had found, by some complex and untraceable revolutionary links, a sacred place on my father's bookshelf next to the equally sacred volumes of Michurin (thanks to whom the people would be saved) and Makarenko's Pedagogical Poem.² Each time I touched the intoxicating brown velvet, the silk lining with a French inscription and mystical foreign names (of a street and a shop in Paris), I remembered the circumstances that had brought Beckerle's hat to our home. On 9 September 1944, that famous day, a group of young members of the Revolutionary Youth Union received an order from the "Center" to get the German enemy off the train on which he was trying to escape from Bulgaria through the southern border. For the perfectly accomplished task, each of them took, "as a memory," a revolutionary trophy. On that very same day, on Bulgaria's northern border, my mother, still a high school student, panic-stricken by her uncle, was hiding away from the communists who were supposedly looking for her to "kill her as an enemy," and as a "German-educated member of the Legion."³ To my question why they would infringe upon somebody's private items, my father, with visible embarrassment, but after all without hesitation, would answer always in the same way: "that was revolutionary justice." Thus I was forced to try to retain and understand the opposite and incommensurable stories of my parents on the same "historical dates," dates as "places." And later—the places of memory of other people, friends and relatives, colleagues, and people whom I don't know personally.... What else is research in social sciences if not a reflection on our experience?

This is not a study of scientific publications by Bulgarian historians devoted to the period of state socialism. It is a study of the way Bulgarian historians remember and narrate that period. I have analyzed about eighty interviews of currently influential scholars, mostly, but not only, historians. The empirical material is vast and difficult to systematize. Indeed, the eminent Bulgarian historian Vera Mutafchieva had a good reason to say in an interview at the beginning of the changes: "I'd rather not talk about the period in question ... the lives of my

¹ A. H. Beckerle (1902–1976), high-ranking member of the SA and deputy of the Nazi Party in the Reichstag, German envoy in Bulgaria during the war. Arrested by the Red Army in southern Bulgaria in 1944, he was in Soviet captivity until 1955. Tried in 1966 in Frankfurt for the deportation and murder of Jews from the newly occupied Bulgarian territories but proceedings abandoned for health reasons in 1968.

² I. V. Michurin (1855–1935), major Russian and Soviet biologist, a founding father of scientific agricultural selection; A. S. Makarenko (1888–1939), Ukrainian and Soviet educator, one of the founders of Soviet pedagogy.

³ She was in fact member of Brannik, the official state organization of Bulgarian youth during World War 2. (The Union of Bulgarian National Legions, founded in 1933, was a nationalist, right-wing monarchist organization, supported by Nazi Germany.)

generation would be better treated in a novel.” But then she went on to speak at length about herself through the lens of the leading question (for every narrative has a leading question, motif, or recurrent “figure in the carpet”⁴): “the compromises with one’s scientific conscience” that everyone had to make at the time in order “to find the minimal gap that would allow them to squeeze through and embark on their [professional] realization.”⁵ Since my theoretical narrative, like any other, has a leading question, too, in this text I am interested mainly in the memory about such “compromises”—about collaborations and resistances, obstacles posed by the regime and privileges granted by the regime. My assumption is that the memories about the compromises, collaborations, and resistances reveal the way historians see their profession—whether they think they were autonomous at the time, and if yes, to what extent. What was the price of this autonomy? Did the professional hierarchies in the socialist *longue durée* manage at all to emancipate themselves from the ideological hierarchies? What did the historians commissioned by the Party do, which books were banned, what were the boundaries between propaganda-ideological acts and civic acts before (as well as after) 1989?

The hypothesis is that there is a significant connection between this type of memories and the perspective on the “decommunization” of history: on the depoliticization of history after 1989 and political pressure on historians, on the notion of what “fair memory” (not just professional memory) of communism means today, and who are the influential figures, generations, institutions, and places for making a history of communism and public policies in this field (including how communism is taught at school and represented in museums, and the effort of particular groups of scholars to change the canonical narrative of communism and the attitude toward the so-called “totalitarian legacy”).

I have analyzed interviews with historians and other researchers of communism (sociologists, anthropologists, and cultural theorists) conducted within the framework of the Remembering Communism Project,⁶ as well as already published interviews. I believe that oral histories contain invaluable information about the communist period that cannot be found in documents kept in state archives. The Institute of Thracology director Alexander Fol’s contempt for the “memoir writers” and “Komsomol apparatchiks’ slurring of people dead and alive” in memoirs published after 1989 seems inappropriate. “The entire documentation about my work has been preserved and is to be found at the Central

⁴ I am referring to Henry James’s short story and Tzvetan Todorov’s use of the metaphor of “the figure in the carpet.”

⁵ Vera Mutafchieva, “Ideologicheskii diktat—totalitarizim v istoriografiata” in *Istoriitsite—za istinata, nasiliata, za sebe si*, eds. Antoaneta Zaprianova and Ekaterina Vecheva (Sofia: Universitetsko izdatelstvo “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 1994), 160.

⁶ In this article I refer to the interviews conducted within the framework of the project “Remembering Communism” as the Research Archive Remembering Communism Project.

Archives Administration with the Council of Ministers," Fol declared.⁷ Other researchers of communism we interviewed⁸ expressed doubt about the truthfulness of the numerous memoirs published by fellow-scholars, interpreting them as attempts at legitimation and self-exoneration.

Here I do not want to discuss the debates on the "truthfulness" of the biographical narratives and oral sources, or the relationship between the witness and the historian (including the especially interesting case where the witness is both a witness and historian—as in the archives analyzed in this study).⁹ I regard them as an important source for understanding socialist historiography and control over the memory of the past. The initial hypothesis is that despite the politico-ideological control, the historical profession was not limited to "serving" the strategies and institutions of a state that had fused with the Party; that it is not true—as an eminent researcher of communism, whom we interviewed in 2007–2008 within the framework of the Remembering Communism Project claims—that "there was no social science before 1989"¹⁰ as well as that every-

⁷ Zaprianova and Vecheva, eds., *Istoritsite*, 20.

⁸ The team of interviewers included full-time assistant professor Valentin Danchev, part-time assistant professor Momchil Hristov, doctoral student Lyuba Devetakova, and Diana Velcheva. I take this opportunity to thank them as well as Nevena Radulova, who conducted two interviews with journalists.

⁹ For more on this issue, see Francois Hartog, *Evidences de l'histoire. Ce que voient les historiens* (Paris: Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Etudes, 1999); Revel, Jaques, ed., *Jeux d'échelles* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996); Maria Todorova, *Zhiviat arkhiv na Vasil Levski i sizzdavaneto na edin natsionalen geroi* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2009).

¹⁰ Research Archive Remembering Communism Project (2008), 19. The numbers given refer to the numbered list of interviews conducted within the framework of my own research project devoted to studying the historians' memory of communism and their attitude toward studies on the communist era. Twenty-six interviews were conducted (with two sociologists, four anthropologists and cultural theorists, eighteen historians, and two journalists specialized in publishing recollections and studies of the communist past). In my analysis I also used seven of the self-interviews conducted by participants of the "Remembering Communism" project, as well as fifteen interviews published in the press and six published memoirs (the focus, however, is not on memoirs). I used sixteen interviews from the New Bulgarian University's two-volume project *Istoriata, naselena s khora*, and all eighteen interviews in what is arguably the first systematic publication of interviews with Bulgarian historians, *Istoritsite—za istinata, za nasiliata, za sebe si* by Antoaneta Zaprianova and Ekaterina Vecheva. In my archives there are two or even three interviews with some of the respondents. I am aware that the very structure of the questions influenced the answers analyzed here. So did the year in which the interviews were conducted. For example, the interviews conducted immediately after 1989 reveal a stronger fear of "an opposite rewriting of history" and a postrevolutionary unfairness toward authoritative members of the professional historical community ("the guild"). A new accent in the interviews conducted after 2000 is the growing competition coming from projects of nongovernmental organizations and private institutes. We can only speculate about the questions asked within the framework of the other studies we use here. For example, the reference to an "opposite rewriting of history" was suggested by the very question asked by the authors. Actually,

thing written by historians, and generally by social scientists, was not “chaff.” But how have the narratives of these interactions changed over the years? How have they been arranged, rearranged, and reassessed amid visible and invisible symbolic violence exercised by the political public sphere? How do respondents not just legitimate but also seek to officialize their memory of the past of Bulgarian historians? One of the central questions through which I read the collected empirical material is: How, and to what extent, do researchers have the autonomy and public influence to oppose the so-called “normalization of communism” and the political formulations of historical truths (not just before but also after 1989)?¹¹ That is because the collected material shows that the researchers are interested in the question of who will determine the new “framework for the memory” of communism, which groups will try—and will they try—to produce a new dominant, canonical narrative of the socialist era that can be used by the new victors (because, as we know, “history is written by the victors”).

Archives, Censorship, (Total?) Control

One of the points on which historians’ memories are very similar—indeed truly shared—concerns the archives: “the struggle for access to documents, to archives” before 1989 and the satisfaction from their opening after 1989. The consensus is that “the opening of the archives was a blessing.... It gave another perspective”; “one of the joys of democracy is the opening of the archives.”¹² To use materials from the archives one needed to receive special permission and to sign for every document received; the reader’s notes were checked carefully and a large part of them were taken away, “whole pages were crossed out” with

one of the respondents, who was asked “Is there a danger of *new-timeserving* [*neokonyunkturshtina*; emphasis added] in Bulgarian historical scholarship?” addresses this explicitly: “With some of its questions, your questionnaire has also given in to the timeserving wave. Please don’t misunderstand me: I, too, am against the totalitarian regime and all the harm it has done. But I don’t accept the way you formulate your questions because they suggest the desired answer and demonstrate your personal attitude. They are worded in the old ‘totalitarian’ style, but with opposite meaning” (Zaprianova and Vecheva, eds., *Istoritsite*, 84–85). The questions in our interviews were centered around thirteen topics and they were designed to obtain information about a much wider range of problems than those discussed in this text.

¹¹ I have shown elsewhere how the social sciences during socialism were not just ideological tools or, conversely, pockets of resistance to Marxist dogmatism, and that the social sciences were transformed “as a result of the transformations of the microstructures of the power itself” (K. Koev). See Liliana Deyanova, “Les sciences sociales socialistes à l’épreuve de la consummation élargie. Le double tournant à l’Est,” in *Vie quotidienne et pouvoirs sous le socialisme*, eds. Nadège Ragaru and Antonela Capelle-Pogacean (Paris: Karthala, 2010), 51–81.

¹² Research Archive, 13, 16.

black marker pen. This "black marker pen" or "black ink" is mentioned very often in the accounts of the period. Historians close to the regime did not have access to most of the party archives. Even a historian who according to Nikolai Genchev's recollections was "responsible for the historical sciences at the Central Committee" of the Bulgarian Communist Party¹³ said in an interview for this study that he was subject to the same rules for access. The Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) archives were subject to special access restrictions (according to some respondents, they were not accessible to nonmembers of the BCP). As a doctoral student at the Institute of History of the BCP, who was not a member of the BCP, recollects:

They wouldn't let me into these archives for a whole year even though I was a graduate student at the Institute.... You read only what they gave you.... There were holdings that were off limits; they wouldn't let you see them, you couldn't see their inventories. Then your notes would be taken away.... It was censorship par excellence—whole pages blacked out with marker pen."¹⁴

Editors also served as censors. There were "controller-police officers," "secret police agents of all sorts," or "a Soviet eye" at scientific institutes. The forms of intervention varied from rejection of manuscripts, blatant falsifications and deletion of passages, to helpful recommendations that the author "quote Todor Zhivkov" or "Marxicize" the already written article. Scientific forums were bugged and taped. People were precluded from specializing abroad, books were banned or discussed at length at the Secretariat of the BCP's Central Committee, and already published books were confiscated. Manuscripts, and especially papers for conferences abroad, needed a special stamp certifying that they did not contain state secrets: "at the end of the corridor at the Institute there was this counter, and when you wanted to go to a conference abroad you had to go and hand over your paper at the 'State Secret' counter and then after twenty days, say, the 'State Secret' [service] would give you back your paper and tell you 'No.'" Because the social sciences were strongly ideologized, "people who were truly good-for-nothing succeeded" in making a good career for them-

¹³ Nikolai Genchev, *Spomeni* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), 348. That is why, according to him, "the materials on the 'historical' April [1956] Plenum [of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party] had been seen by [only] three people before 1989," Georgi Dimitrov's diary by not many more, while the historian X—whom others call "the most permanent resident in the Archives," "the historian who created a scientific school of contemporary history"—took part in the writing of an extensive biography of Todor Zhivkov and had to put up with being humiliated by the apparatchiks responsible for the correctness (conformity with the requirements for an exemplary biography of a communist leader) and coherence of Zhivkov's biography in order to stand a better chance of accessing the secret archives.

¹⁴ Valeri Roussanov in Vera Mutafchieva et al., eds., *Istoriyata, naselena s khora* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2006), vol. 2, 191.

selves. Many of the respondents said that they were watched by the DS (for Dîrzhavna Sigurnost or State Security, the Bulgarian secret service). But many of them also personally knew the DS agent who was responsible for them. “The person from the DS who was responsible” for our institute (for me, “for our group”) is mentioned in quite a few accounts.

Many of the researchers remember the personalization of power structures. “Scientific workers” “found gaps” in the system that allowed them to squeeze through and make it with the help of particular individuals, acquaintances, acquaintances of acquaintances, or strangers in important positions who turned out to be “decent people.”¹⁵ The respondents, however, have many common memories of zones of freedom that provided an escape from the official structures and discourses of the party-state. Yet one is struck by the difference in the content of the memories, as well as in the interpretations of the reasons for the existence of these “islands of free thought.” The majority of the then young historians spoke about the annual meetings of young scholars in the town of Primorsko, describing them as one of the places of “strongest oppositional discourse.” This was also the case with some seminars, professional units, and groups: “The [University of Sofia’s] Faculty of History was one of the most liberal places [in Bulgaria] and a center of dissent. Professor Nikolai Genchev played an exceptional role [in this respect]”¹⁶; “I used to work at the liberal center of cultural studies under the direction of Nikolai Genchev, who had the reputation of a dissident”; “What were probably the most critical things about socialism as a system were said during the theoretical seminar on the problems of socialism [at the University of Sofia Faculty of History]”¹⁷; “The historians were more politicized than we were.”

¹⁵ For instance, as one respondent relates “to become assistant professor at Sofia University I had to submit three character reference letters from BCP members and one from the Fatherland Front. Fortunately, a clerk turned a blind eye to the fact that I didn’t have a character reference letter from the Fatherland Front and they allowed me to take part in the competition”; “my boss ... called his fellow-student from the Committee of ... and, ultimately, they gave me permission” (Research Archive, 19).

¹⁶ Ludzhev in Vera Mutafchieva et al., eds., *Istoriyata, naselena s khora* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2005), vol. 1, 218.

¹⁷ Here there are significant differences in attitudes depending on the respondents’ positions in the structure of the scientific field. Whereas many of the historians think that the nationalist discourse, which was rediscovered in the 1970s, was a new strategy for legitimating the regime (Research Archive, 9), others regard it as a form of dissidence. “Thracology was never politicized, nor was it ever used for jingoistic purposes,” says Institute of Thracology Director Alexander Fol (Zaprianova and Vecheva, eds., *Istoriysite*, 18). As for the accusation that he had belonged to the scientific *nomenklatura*, he said he was “proud to have belonged to the *nomenklatura* ... *nomen calare* means calling the elect by name, a roll-call of the best to assign them responsible tasks” (ibid., 24). “[There was] free speech at seminar X ... contrary to [the situation in] my department [at the University of Sofia], where there was one [certified] Partisan [anti-

Compromises and Resistances

The difference in the way the past is remembered is all the more evident when the respondents were asked about compromises and collaboration with the regime:

I didn't make compromises, but then neither did I say the whole truth, telling them that their ideology was rotten... I didn't accept compromises, big compromises like, say, becoming a member of the BCP without believing in that ideology... They ought to confess in some way and repent in public. But a large part of them haven't done it. [After 1989] they rewrote their lives and devoted themselves to studying communism.¹⁸

I twice refused to become a member of the Party... They stopped some of my texts from publication, threatened me, sent secret police agents to talk sense into me.¹⁹

"My generation obeyed the canons..."²⁰

The historians who see themselves as "reformers of the system" tell about their battles with dogmatism, with the Stalinists—"this biggest capital of communism," of "socialism without a human face." This is the accent, the telos of their narrative. Quite a few of them admit that they had also written articles which were "adjusted to the requirements of politics." But they "made compromises not for the sake of promotion but in order to achieve their long-term goals." That is why the question that is significant to them after 1989 is, "Will the historian who leafs through our works ever grasp the main idea each one of us defended, or judge them to be the outcomes of secondary concessions we agreed to make?"²¹ Here the notions of decency are associated less with the battles between the "party members" and the professionals (some of whom are convinced that "there was no social science" in communist Bulgaria) than with the battle with the Stalinists, "with the Stalinist mafia in the professional unit": "the clash of dogmatism and the creative approach," "the struggle between the old and the young ... the supporters of Stalinism and the young historians who were called revisionists," "innovative historians and conservative historians," between the intellectuals who were "liberals of the 1960s" and "the police informers" in a university faculty where the party secretary was "a former full-time intelligence officer."

However, these "reformers of the system" are very different as a group: some had illusions ("as a child of my time I, too, paid tribute to a series of illu-

Nazi resistance fighter] and two [certified] helpers of the Partisans, as well as many other people who wanted to be Partisans and helpers of the Partisans, but weren't" (Research Archive, 19).

¹⁸ Ibid., 17.

¹⁹ Ibid., 19.

²⁰ V. Gyuzelev in Zaprianova and Vecheva, eds., *Istoritsite*, 89

²¹ Ilcho Dimitrov in *ibid.*, 104.

sory views”); others had no illusions and made the compromise of becoming professional apparatchiks, while still others, the younger ones, are convinced that they “never made any compromises,” that they “never quoted Todor Zhivkov.”

The collected interviews reveal that there were different types of solidarity among professionals belonging to different groups: “[we were] a group accused of all possible ideological sins, of revisionism, nationalism, anti-Sovietism”; in the Bulgarian–Soviet historical commission “the true historians did not give in” to the pressure “despite the instructions from the top”; “the historians at the university” differed from “the historians at AONSU,” the party-sponsored Academy of Social Sciences and Social Management; “[in our institute] there was a group that did not work on the most ideologized problems of the discipline (still, there was a choice, you could choose not to work on some super-ideologized [problem])”; “not quoting, say, Lenin was a matter of honor”; “these were small battles, but there were also big battles—such as working on prohibited topics, refusing to work on what the regime directly ordered you to... on the pseudo-reforms.”²²

In the narrative of compromises and resistances there are also differences in the modalities in which they are discussed—humbly, ironically, or in a teleology of conscious and unswerving battles with the system since earliest childhood.²³ Some respondents do not mention their acts of resistance, but there is evidence about them in numerous documents. For example, Nikolai Genchev writes in his memoirs that “an underground organization—‘Little Czechoslovakia’”—was founded at Sofia University’s Faculty of Philosophy and History at the time of the Prague Spring of 1968, and recounts the battle of students—parallel with the accounts of fellow-historians, such as H. U.—“to do something in defense of Czechoslovakia.”²⁴

Thus, *there are indeed significant differences behind the general term “compromises,”* even though most of the respondents think that the system was powerful and that it was impossible to circumvent “the canon.” “Take a closer look and you’ll find a compromise everywhere,” “everyone made compromises, the history of everyday life [the respondent has in mind the normalization of communism in the 1970s and 1980s] is more a history of compromises—if you weren’t a dissident and hadn’t defected to the West.” According to some researchers, the problem was “how not to produce data convenient for the regime”: “But it was also

²² Research Archive, 1.

²³ Some common tropes are: “they didn’t give us Chavdarche [the communist youth organization for children aged seven to ten] scarves because we boycotted [the parade to] welcome Khrushchev”; “wearing the red [Pioneer Children’s] scarf was a trauma for me. ... I would remove it immediately after school”; “we were partially normal, schizophrenic.”

²⁴ Genchev, *Spomeni*, 196.

possible to do something else, it was possible to look for the possibilities provided by the system itself in order to soften its repressive impact. I think that this, precisely, is what was significant, what was characteristic of research work in the field of sociological studies [of X]"; there were also many scholars who secured zones of freedom, "who pushed the limits a bit further."²⁵

Critical or Legitimizing Memory of the Previous Regime/Society

The different and, as we saw above, sometimes even incommensurable memories of compromises and resistances at the time have produced a visible and growing difference in the reading of the recent past today: the difference between "the critical and the legitimating reading of communism." I use quotation marks because these are not my analytical categories in describing the collected data, but classifications used by the respondents themselves. They spoke of "historians who want to normalize²⁶ socialism," of "a normalizing and moral reading of the communist regime," of a "positivistic" and a "value-based" ("moral") reading of the past: "I think that the brutalizing effect of this regime should not be placed in parenthesis in any way. And not a single grand narrative of the modernization Bulgaria underwent at the time ... can conceal the high price, primarily moral, of this type of social transformation. Some may never-

²⁵ Here the respondent is referring to the sociological studies of X and other civic acts that were indeed unusual for a regime with a sham public sphere, studies which indeed said—and, at that explicitly—that "the emperor is naked," studies in which the very questions in a questionnaire about an antiparty action were perceived as being "antigovernment slogans." But he also has in mind the fears that accompanied such studies, for every transgression in communist society was punished, and sometimes disproportionately severely.

²⁶ See Adorno's 1959 lecture on what it means to come to terms with (or work through) the past (Theodor Adorno, "What Does Coming to Terms with the Past Mean?," in *Bitburg in Moral and Political Perspective*, ed. Geoffrey Hartman [Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1986], 114–29), and Jeffrey K. Olick's 1998 article. For "the different constellations of interests that produce new images of the past and the new images of the past that allow new power positions" (Jeffrey K. Olick, "What Does It Mean to Normalize the Past? Official Memory in German Politics since 1989," *Social Science History* 22, no. 4 [1998]: 550) and for the birth of the notion of "politics of memory" after the shift from Social Democratic to Christian Democratic rule see also Robert G. Moeller, "What Has 'Coming to Terms with the Past' Meant in Post-World II Germany?," *Central European History* 35, no. 2 (2002): 229. Of course, what we have in Bulgaria are "local uses of these categories" and different contexts and understandings of the term "normalization." ("Normalization is when one says that communism is bad and then 600 pages of *but* follow"; "normalization is not understanding that socialism is evil," "every theorizing here is normalization because it is still too early to talk of theory," "studies of everyday life are normalizing ... they don't understand that communism is a crime against everyday life, its greatest sin is anthropological.")

theless still continue to call it modernization”²⁷; “Today there are direct political influences or actions driven by personal convictions of historians with concrete party allegiances. I think that Mrs. X is such a person. She studies socialism from a very particular point of view and tries to turn the period between 1944 and 1989 into one of the traditional phases in Bulgarian history that is not much different from all other phases”²⁸; “Then the project of ... Remembering Communism was launched, a project in which I see a normalizing element because it substitutes the history of the entire phenomenon with the history of its anthropological and oral reconstruction and claims that the everyday life of socialism in the 1970s and 1980s was not as terrible as some describe it.”²⁹

In almost all the interviews there is an emphasis on this problem—on the problem of scientific honesty and integrity, on the morality of the researchers, on the memory that tries to exonerate and displace the blame for collaborationism.

This opposition between *critical* and *legitimizing* memory appears in the responses to different questions. The critical readings are often localized in alternative places for conducting research on communism (of course, here the respondents assess “the new places” in diametrically opposite ways):

New centers that are to some extent an alternative to the old places have emerged. [One example is the] the Center for Advanced Study, which attracts a particular circle of historians the majority of whom have some kind of a career at the university. But this is a place where they can express themselves more freely, feel better, get better paid when they have projects to work on. The Institute for Studies of the Recent Past is also such a place and so is, perhaps, the New Bulgarian University. What’s new about them is that they offer alternatives, being places—physical and public places—where the atmosphere is somewhat different from that at the university.... The dominant reading of history is, after all, of two kinds: a critical and a legitimating, exonerating one. Each one of them formats in some way the perspective on the past. One could hardly expect that the critical perspective and the people who share it will produce very positive assessments of socialism. The other perspective, the legitimating one, does not exclude criticism either. But there criticism is concentrated on the early Stalinist period.³⁰

Another large group of researchers—called by their opponents “conservative historians,” “nationally engaged historians,” “historians who are not legitimate in the West,” historians “whom Western journals are not interested in,”³¹ histo-

²⁷ Research Archive, 2.

²⁸ Ibid., 19.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Research Archive, 1. There are even more radical criticisms of the past by representatives of both types of researchers who have worked during the communist period—“today, they represent themselves as victims of the power that supposedly came from above and restricted their free choice ... not admitting that power was emanating from them” (Chavdar Marinov, “L’impasse du passé. La construction nationale macédonienne et le conflit politico-historiographique entre la Bulgarie et la Macédoine,” Thèse de doctorat, EHESS, Paris, 2006).

³¹ Research Archive, 2.

rians who "have no chance to work on Western projects"³²—are of the opposite opinion. They consider their reading to be "critical," not legitimating. They call "legitimating" or "ideological" the reading of fellow-researchers who "have promptly changed the regime they serve," i.e., the anticommunist for the communist regime: "There is no censorship [after 1989], but some colleagues have willingly bowed to political pressure and have gone too far in their effort to rewrite some moments of history; this has led to extreme assessments."³³

Such opposite opinions were also expressed in the responses to our question about the positions and places that exert the strongest influence on studies of communism today: "The strongest influence is exerted by some revanchist [tendencies].... The attempts to renounce everything from the past are made primarily by people who were hurt by the regime." According to a third type of responses to this question, "the most anticommunist" have turned out to be "the writings of the formerly privileged scientific *nomenklaturas* or of those close to them." According to a fourth type of views, "it is entirely normal to change your views about communism" or about the limits to the compromises that you are willing to make. "[T]he recently founded private institute," "the institute for the recent past" is also mentioned often as a place that influences studies of communism.

Of course, "critical" has different connotations in the corpus I have collected: readings that criticize memoir literature and focus on the objective voice of documents ("according to the guild's criterion of scientificity") are called "critical"; so are the seminars and debates outside the historical community, and those of the nonstate institutions that contest the old monopoly and guarantee pluralism. Studies conducted by young scholars who are the only ones that can take a detached perspective on the communist era (because they are "unencumbered"³⁴) are also called "critical." The term "critical" is additionally used for studies that view socialism as an alternative attempt at modernization and construct middle-range theories in order to understand how that happened.... If we take into consideration the echoes of the big battle between the so-called "*totalitarian*" and "*revisionist paradigms*"³⁵ in Bulgaria, we can indeed identify two groups of epistemological and preepistemological premises.

³² And also "who were not *invited* [emphasis added] by the Open Society [Institute] project that was later transferred to the Institute for Studies of the Recent Past" (ibid., 9).

³³ Ibid., 15.

³⁴ Ibid., 5.

³⁵ See, e. g., Sheila Fitzpatrick's critiques against the "totalitarian" paradigm, influential during the Cold War: Sheila Fitzpatrick, "Revisionism in Soviet History," *History and Theory* 46, no. 4 (2007): 77–91. The totalitarian *telos* of the new Slovene historiography is analyzed in Rastko Mochnik, "Ce que la mémoire fait à l'histoire," in *Histoire de l'oubli en contextes postsocialiste et postcolonial*, eds. Patrick Vauday et al. (Koper: Annales, 2009), 215–34. See also the special issue "Expertise historiennes" of *Sociétés contemporaines* 39 (2000).

But many of those who do not accept the socialist modernization paradigm (which, in their view, also signifies processes of emancipation of professional from ideological criteria even before 1989, and a growing autonomy of professional communities) talk about “true studies even before 1989,” and “dissertations written according to the requirements of the profession.” According to them, before 1989, too, “resisting the regime was a professional norm”; “the science of history served as a corrective to ideological propositions.” There are contradictory memories about the atmosphere in a university department for the same period: “there was open resistance to ideology in the lectures of *all* instructors”³⁶; “this was a morass.”³⁷ Nonhomogeneities and even contradictions are to be found not just in the different views collected in the course of this study but also, not infrequently, within a single interview. For example, despite the memory of “the lectures of all instructors who resisted ideology” and “the greatest dissident of them all, Nikolai Genchev,” a respondent approves of the Panev Act.³⁸ One of the respondents pointed out that he was against this lustration law because this type of law would eliminate even top dissident Andrei Sakharov, since the post of director of the Institute of Nuclear Physics was part of the Politburo *nomenklatura*. This, however, will be discussed in the next section.

Remembering and Codifying Communism

In this chapter I analyze rememberings of lived socialism, trying to read them as experience (multiple experiences), for I realize there is a difference between lived and narrated socialism, between memories of socialism narrated to researchers and memories narrated in other contexts, including in scientific publications. I am concerned with the growing difference between these rememberings of socialism and “the memory of communism,” between the memory of communism and the historiography of communism, i.e., between *collective memories* of different groups or generations and *historical memory*. (Historical or historiographical memory, too, is the memory of different groups and generations, including those whose experience and historiographical works have been delegitimated).³⁹

³⁶ Research Archive, 3.

³⁷ Ibid., 5.

³⁸ This is the 1992 lustration law which eliminated the selfsame instructors from participation not just in the scientific managing boards of democratic institutions but also in scientific competitions. It affected the majority of those professors, including Genchev, who had served as faculty party secretary.

³⁹ If it is at all possible to accept this debatable distinction first made by Maurice Halbwachs and then by Pierre Nora and Michel de Certeau. See Liliana Deyanova, *Ochertaniata na milchanieto. Istoricheska sotsiologiya na kolektivnata pamet* (Sofia: Kritika i Khumanizim, 2009).

Iskra Baeva and Petya Kabakchieva explore in detail the different phases in the interpretations of the communist past after the disintegration of the official memory of the previous party-state in their paper in this volume. Here I cannot go into the difficulties historians are facing in their efforts to hierarchize the huge amount of published recollections and documents about communism, and to turn them into a "normal," i.e., objective, history and "fair" memory of the past, in which all narratives and historiographical studies will have an equal chance of being heard. Having said this, my assumption is that there is an "ideal type" of modern *public sphere of history*, i.e., that the modern places of memory (including the places of memory from the previous era) are *common places of memory*, even though they are not *places of common memory*. They are common places of memory, but they are no one's; although they are no one's, they are, by definition, at stake in the battle of conflicting interpretations (which, however have equal access to the public sphere), and a possibility for the state, "Europe," various groups, etc., to assert their symbolic monopoly over these interpretations.⁴⁰

The "pressure from Moscow," as the respondents recall, was an attempt to assert such a symbolic monopoly. The first academic history of Bulgaria was produced in the form of a mock-up, a "maquette," so that it could be easily rearranged.⁴¹ But, says one of the respondents,⁴² isn't the part about Bulgaria, put together in Paris by Stéphane Courtois's team in Part 2 of his "Black Book of Communism,"⁴³ something similar as well? In an interview I conducted with one of the authors of the chapter about Bulgaria, Prof. Liubomir Ognianov, he said he

⁴⁰ The transition called a "transition to democracy" and to the institutions—including scientific institutions—of so-called democratic modernity coincided with a radical transformation of Western modernity itself. This involved transformations in the role and institutions of the human sciences, of the science of history, and of the need for "expertise" in an era called post-industrial or postnational. Among the symptoms of these transformations are the debates on the "laws on memory" and the debates on a state-financed and state-controlled history. That is why it is worrying that there is fragmentation of research on communism and that some researchers feel no need to coordinate their studies. I mentioned some symptoms of this change earlier: the growing opposition (used for political purposes) between the projects of state-employed historians and of historians working for private foundations.

⁴¹ See Vasilka Tîpkova-Zaimova, "Obsîzhane na maketa na tom pîrvi na *Istoriia na Bîlgariia*," *Istorieski pregled* 1 (1954): 108–16. I take this opportunity to thank Prof. Tîpkova-Zaimova for her reminiscences of the visit of three leading Soviet historians instrumental in the production of the "maquette."

⁴² Research Archive, 26.

⁴³ Stéphane Courtois, *Du passé faisons table rase. Histoire et mémoire du communisme en Europe* (Paris: Robert Laffont, 2002). (The chapter is by Diniou Charlanov, Liubomir Ognianov, and Plamen S. Tzvetkov: "La Bulgarie sous le joug communiste: crimes, résistances et répressions.") Stéphane Courtois is one of the leading experts on the new dominant memory of communism and a major figure in the drafting and adoption of Resolution 1481 and in advocating the creation of an institute to unify the memory of communism on a scientific basis.

had been very surprised when he saw that the text he had sent for the book—"a conscientious study of mine on a particular subject I had been studying for a long time"—had been changed and merged with two other texts, by Diniou Sharlanov and Plamen S. Tsvetkov—without him being notified. Generalizations and assessments, with which he would not identify himself as an author, had been included in the coauthored text; nor would he have titled the chapter "Bulgaria under the Communist Yoke." In Bulgaria, too, a newly established institute wants "the knowledge and memory of the recent past to be institutionalized," clearing up the previous interpretations in order to allow "the truth" to shine through and "become a norm that will make its way into the public mind through textbooks, museums."⁴⁴ In that milieu, *opinions are indeed diverse and they should not be presented as homogenous*. I am aware that such classifications construct false identities but these are not my classifications; they are descriptions of the language in which the Bulgarian situation is described by the interviewees themselves. For instance, according to other authors close to that institute, "the historian should not create the politics of the period, he must not educate and inculcate." Others want this to be done by nongovernmental organizations because they "doubt [that] those who are in official, state-guaranteed niches [where] they are doing nothing or are only pretending to be doing something"⁴⁵ are capable of doing it. Still others doubt the scientific objectivity of those who have "the generous support" of "funds coming from outside [the country]."⁴⁶ The narrative of the past is being freed from the chaos of experience (from "the sound and the fury" of lived experience) in order to be given an institutional framework and even to be made uncontestable. There have recently been many attempts to pass laws on "the memory of communism." Such is, for example, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Resolution 1481 (2006) on "the need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes." For all of twenty years now, different groups in Bulgaria have been trying to assert their memory as "the true memory of communism," to control textbooks, monuments, museums, media—or, in other words, to acquire monopoly over the legitimate symbolic violence and over the interpretations of the common places of the memory of "communism." I will mention several episodes in the attempts at creating laws "on memory."

On 30 March 2000 the Bulgarian Parliament discussed and, a month later, passed an "Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in

⁴⁴ [Interview with] Ivailo Znepolski, "Obshtestvoto vse oshte e zatvoreno," *Dnevnik*, 26 December 2007 (Sofia edition), 1. For a critical commentary on the new historiographical studies, see Todor Khristov, "Vinovната istina: Chetiri izsledvaniia na vlastta predi i sled 1989," *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 3–4 (2009): 305–27.

⁴⁵ Research Archive, 2.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 15.

Bulgaria.” Other parliamentary panels and committees are discussing various proposals for creating an Institute of National Memory.⁴⁷ In some draft laws the Institute of National Memory is even called Institute for Studies of the Crimes of Communism. That is why, for example, the UDF has proposed that 50% of the members of the Institute be appointed by the Union of the Repressed People in Bulgaria after 9 September 1944, and the rest by the Supreme Judicial Council and the National Assembly. Item 6 of article 28 of this draft law defines as a main task of the future Institute “the formation of proposals on history curricula that will be made available to the Ministry of Education.”⁴⁸ This act marked the end of a series of attempts to pass decommunization and lustration laws in Bulgaria.

A typical lustration law was the “Act to Introduce on a Provisional Basis Certain Additional Qualifications for Senior Members of Scientific Institutions and the Higher Certifying Commission of 9 December 1992” (known as the Panev Act after the UDF MP who moved it).⁴⁹ On 21 October 1998 Parliament passed a Public Administration Act that contained lustration provisions. The then president, Petăr Stoyanov, used his right of veto and returned the act for further debate. On 30 July 1997 the National Assembly passed, again with a UDF majority, a law on declassifying the DS files. But this law was revoked.⁵⁰ It was only after December 2006 that a law, a commission, and access to the secret police files were in force. The fixation upon secret police files, conspiracy paradigms, and “a clean past” proved to be one of the central issues in the debates on the memory of communism.

The above-mentioned PACE Resolution 1481 of 25 January 2006 on “the need for international condemnation of crimes of totalitarian communist regimes,” is rightly considered to be the *culmination of the attempts to condemn*

⁴⁷ A project of historians close to the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which provides for the creation of a “democratic,” “anticommunist” Institute of National Memory (modeled on the Polish Institute of National Memory which, they say, was “created to implement the decisions of the European Parliament”), was discussed in 2002 at the international roundtable discussion “*PACE Resolution 1096 and the Problems of Its Enforcement in Some Countries of the Former Socialist Camp*.” (In the context of a system of measures necessary for “eliminating the legacy of the totalitarian systems and conducting *lustration by independent commissions*.”)

⁴⁸ The positive vote for the Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria was predetermined by the UDF majority in parliament. The Socialists called the act “insane.”

⁴⁹ A year later, however, the Alternative Socialist Party moved the so-called Anti-Panev Act. It blocked the implementation of the “UDF Act” even before the Socialists were officially restored to power in 1994.

⁵⁰ This was after a new, centrist, formation came to power—the National Movement Simeon II (NMSS) coalition. The pretext for that was the need for a more perfect Classified Information Act (passed in April 2002). By virtue of this very act, the relevant commission in charge of declassifying the secret police files, the so-called Andreev Commission, was closed down.

communism. The calls for a Nuremberg Trial of communism are becoming louder because—they say, and this seems to be said ever more frequently in Bulgaria, too—“*the communist regime is more perverse even than the Nazi regime*.” The attempts of the European People’s Party/Christian Democrats to promote this very formula (together with Resolution 1481, which was actually the result of the party’s long and skillful lobbying campaign) in a document called “Recommendation to the Council of Ministers,” failed to win the necessary two-thirds majority. This means that the cliché will not yet be included in the history textbooks of the member countries concerned. But the problem of the official memory of “communism,” of the effort of particular groups to officialize their memory of “this regime,” to turn it into a juridical law, a moral norm, and even into a scientific truth with the help of “their historians,” remains outstanding. In 2006 this resolution was not approved by the Bulgarian Parliament. This happened in 2009. Soon afterwards, on 19 November 2009, this Parliament also approved the European Parliament Resolution on European Conscience and Totalitarianism of 2 April 2009 (proclaiming 23 August a “Day of Remembrance of the Crimes and Victims of the National Socialist, Communist and All Other Totalitarian Regimes”).⁵¹ The Bulgarian participation in the *initiative* and adoption of PACE Resolution 1481 was not insignificant. The initial text of this resolution—according to Bulgarian politician Lîchezar Toshev’s account—was designed and written in Bulgaria, then taken to Strasbourg, debated, revised, and registered as a document to be put to the vote, after a rally of the repressed people on the island of Persin (in Bulgaria) in 2003. In the name of this cause, a special website, “Decommunization,” was created in Bulgaria, and a conference was organized in Koprivshtitsa on “The International Condemnation of Communism: The Initiative of the European People’s Party—The Bulgarian Perspective.” A newly founded institute was also presented there on 24 September 2004.⁵²

There were also quite contradictory views in the responses to the several questions in our interviews related to the “decommunization laws,” the Panev Act, the European resolutions and “laws on memory,” and the influential groups in today’s readings of the history of communism. Some respondents believe in the new “concentrated efforts of talented people” in “the large-scale projects of X and of Y,” but think that “it is too early to speak of a historiographical canon

⁵¹ Incidentally, a monument (sic!) to Resolution 1481 was inaugurated in Hungary in October 2008. Headlines such as “EPP Warns against Promotion of Communist Symbols in Some Member States” are becoming ever more frequent.

⁵² Registered as a nongovernmental organization with a scientific board, connected with the activity of Kalin Manolov, a Radio New Europe journalist and author of the 2003 program for Bulgaria’s decommunization and democratization: Institute for Studies of the Crimes of Communism. The purpose was to publish the materials in a book to be presented to the PACE. See *Memory for Tomorrow* (Sofia: Rabotilnitsa za Knizhnina, 2005).

and maybe it is not even necessary to create such a canon."⁵³ Others question the very idea of creating "a unified narrative of European history on a scientific basis" which, moreover, excludes for example "the common antifascist experience" and ostracizes the antifascist resistance not just in Bulgaria.⁵⁴

Still others think that the page of the past will be (re)written many times and that the idea of reading that page is

absurd, for it presupposes that it can be read in only one way.... On the contrary, the facts may be the same, but the points of view change. All this effort to codify [the page of the past] in only one reading, which has not even been done yet, i.e., to codify it a priori, before someone actually writes it, is improper, alarming.... I'm not worried by the fact that we don't have a textbook that makes the memory of this period normative in a consensual way. I can't think of an era on which there is consensual opinion ... and I'm not sure that's necessarily a bad thing. I can't see why precisely communism has to be read in this way—normatively.⁵⁵

History is written by the victors, but the victory itself may turn out to be a pyrrhic victory.... Now there are forecasts associated with barricades, there are stakeholders and many illusions.... As regards [Bulgaria's] "dark fascist past"—this was a propaganda line. But it's also entirely obvious that the European Resolution 1481 has a political subtext, too [the strategies of the European People's Party].⁵⁶

No one has yet defined the framework for a definitive interpretation of the period; this is only just beginning to be done. There have been some attempts to conceptualize the period, but I personally don't take them seriously.⁵⁷

In this text I do not distinguish explicitly between the two very different aspects of "decommunization." Indeed, these are quite different things, although they are connected: decommunization of the actual institutions and rules (such as, for example, the closing down of the numerous so-called "ideological departments" in 1990–1991), on the one hand, and decommunization of the historiographical interpretations of communism, of the until then influential official histories of the period on the basis of which textbooks, museum concepts, and so on, were written, on the other. Many of the historians disagree with the concrete measures taken in the course of decommunization in Bulgaria, with the content of the adopted laws ("The Panev Act is very stupid, just like Panev himself,"⁵⁸ "The Panev Act is stupid, but I had to vote for it because of party solidarity,"⁵⁹ "In Bulgaria everything gets done in a muddled way, it's all a mess"⁶⁰). However, the policy of restricting the activity of former communist

⁵³ Research Archive, 10.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 26.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

scholars is often regarded as justified: “It’s fair to have restrictions on their professional involvement, on their interference in the professional community at present.... This has made it possible for new people to enter this closed community”;⁶¹ “Just as there were sanctions on Nazism, so, too, there should be sanctions on communism in its most criminal dimensions.”⁶² The new institutes for the study of the crimes of communism (including the draft laws on an Institute for National Memory) became the object of conflicting assessments but not of a public debate. Some researchers associate them not so much with scientific institutes but with the former “institutes for propaganda.” Others, however, are convinced that these institutes are the long-desired opportunity of “guaranteeing the freedom of scientific research,” of an objective reading that used to be obstructed by the “communist *nomenklatura*.”⁶³ The problem is why there is no debate on these issues among the historians. According to B. Niagulov, “serious historians” have preferred to dissociate themselves from the historians working for the new political agenda; furthermore, they “lack the freedom to publicly defend academic studies.”⁶⁴ According to some of the researchers we interviewed, there is no debate “because it’s considered embarrassing ... since this would mean starting a war within the guild itself. And because of the unclear consensus, there’s somehow no debate; in other words, this is regarded as an embarrassing, human question that ought to be resolved outside the community itself.”⁶⁵ There is a “tense silence” within the intellectual community⁶⁶ and also an increasingly more visible lack of communication between the groups and the

⁶¹ Ibid., 5.

⁶² Ibid., 9.

⁶³ In a small study of the immediate reaction to the adoption of Resolution 1481, which I conducted in 2006, I found out that the historians and the researchers of communism themselves often make comments on the political attitudes of their colleagues. What immediately drew attention was the political bias of historians, and mostly of the specialists in contemporary history and the history of communism in particular. Bulgarian historians are, most generally, of two kinds—rightist or leftist, having—and I am oversimplifying here—anticommunist or communist views, or what we call “blue” or “red” ones. This is manifested even at the level of the choice of concepts—whether they call the regime “totalitarian” or “socialist,” “socialist” or “communist.” As a historian said, “there is an open conflict between two groups of very valuable professionals,” of which “the marginals take advantage.” In their majority, historians believe that those researchers, who are committed to the initiative of the European Popular Party and the Institutes for National Memory, are “marginal” or at least not very authoritative “in the guild.” See Liliana Deyanova, “Des condamnations locales du communisme à la Condamnation internationale de janvier 2006 (les guerres des élites bulgares pour le monopole de la mémoire du communisme),” in *Expérience et mémoire*, eds. Bogumil Jewciewicki and Erika Nimis (Paris: L’Harmattan, 2008), 193–213.

⁶⁴ Blagovest Niagulov, “Kak da pishem istoriia na blizkoto minalo,” *Kultura*, 19 February 2010, 6.

⁶⁵ Research Archive, 3.

⁶⁶ Research Archive, Self Interviews, Remembering Communism Project (2007).

generation of researchers included into the different scientific bodies and competing projects ("encapsulation," as Niagulov puts it). In this sense, there is fragmentation of researchers and a lack of new social positions that could make possible the opposition to the political formulations of scientific truths. In this context, new social positions that enable one to freely study, say, the violence before 9 September 1944 (or to study the new antitotalitarian consensus presupposing—as Habermas says—an a priori anti-fascism) without being accused of "sympathizing with the left," are still not possible. Conspicuously absent are also positions that would be independent from the symbolic violence and economic market coercion, as well as from the mock-up (the "maquette") that edits out and homogenizes all fuzzy rememberings and "unifies memory on a scientific basis."

Translation by Katerina Popova

22. Theater Artists and the Bulgarian Authorities in the 1960s: Memories of Conflicts, Conflict of Memories

Natalia Hristova

For more than thirty years my research focus has been on Bulgarian culture in the second half of the twentieth century. In the last twenty years I branched out from the archive and literary works into the sprawling memoir literature, and I have been conducting interviews with Bulgarian intellectuals. I cannot recall whether my choice for interviews was based on the fact of my personal acquaintance with writers, or whether I was attracted to critical authors and their literature. Most likely, the two coincided.

During the two postsocialist decades I also started looking more closely at theater artists and cineastes, in other words, with representatives of those arts that have an immediate effect on the audience. The project “Remembering Communism” allowed me to concentrate on those theater artists who created or witnessed repressed plays and who kept and shared their memories (traumatic or not). Most of them turned out to be from the 1960s. I tried to explain the reasons for this phenomenon in my chapter.

The sixth decade of the twentieth century was different and equally impressive in the East and West, both in spirit and with its specific social and cultural events. The postwar depression had been overcome. The new generations opposed the preceding permeation of life with ideologies and confrontation; they were striving for a vibrant personal self-realization. The 1960s in Bulgaria, approached from the perspective of the theatrical reincarnations, seem just as vital, liberating, and free, although they have, as elsewhere, their specific features. During the transitional decades (1990s–2000s), amid the hype to share, collect, and publish memories of communism, theater professionals, too, produced recollections about the mental and moral damages incurred by official censorship, which ranged from sharp criticism to discontinuation of individual productions. The project “Theatrical Tensions,” realized in a special issue of the theatrical almanac *Gestus* is a typical example of this trend.¹ The members of the editorial

¹ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh* (Sofia: Fondatsiia “Ideia za teatır,” 2003).

board announce in the foreword that "they shall concentrate their attention on the curious story of several theatrical performances that have become subject to verbal mythologization in the existence of Bulgarian Theater."²

In all memories repressions are condemned, perceived most generally as inadmissible then and unforgivable today, a violation of the freedom of creative expression, even though some recollections show understanding toward the specific character of the period by interpreting the reasons that have provoked the authorities to suppress the plays. There are also discrepancies in the information and precision of detail between the different authors either about the socialist period in general, or with regards to a specific theatrical staging. One can also notice a selectivity of memory. The reason for this "conflict of remembering" is to be found in the different positions occupied by the memoirists at the time, i.e., the creators or witnesses of the specific performance, and in the way playwrights, producers, stage artists, composers, or audiences experienced "martyrdom" and "heroism," the social positions brought to the fore by the political situation of the transition period. Some of the memoirs are definitely an attempt to counteract these dominant tendencies.

This text accordingly focuses on a close interpretation of the memories of the theatrical events rather than on the events themselves. The analysis is based on shorthand minutes from discussions and the reviews in the press from those days, but predominantly on the published surveys with creators and witnesses. Since there are no archival data about the discontinuation of some of the performances, one can reconstruct how this has happened only from memoirs and interviews. I stress this fact to counter the generally accepted thesis that memories are too subjective, and therefore unreliable, sources of information and should be used only as auxiliary sources—for "color" and "atmosphere." This excessive suspicion toward memoiristic literature can be a hindrance to a reliable historical reconstruction.

In this study I analyze in particular the memoirs pertaining to the following plays: *Improvisation* by Radoi Ralin and Valeri Petrov, staged in the State Satirical Theater in the 1962–1963 season; *Abel's Mistake* by Emil Manov, staged in the People's Theater in Dimitrovgrad in 1963–1964; *The Poet and the Mountain* by Ivan Teofilov, at the Theater of the Armed Forces in Sofia in 1963–1964; *Sky and Earth* by Kliment Tsachev, in the Drama Theater in Pleven in 1963–1964; and *We Are 25 Years Old* by Nedialko Iordanov, at the Drama Theater in Burgas in 1969–1970.

During the 1960s, other plays performed in different theaters in the capital and in the countryside were also repressed: *The True Ivailo* by Stefan Tsanev, *Machovo Birdo* by Miron Ivanov, *We Do Not Believe in Storks* by Nedialko Iordanov, *The Old Man and the Arrow* by Nikola Rusev, *I Was Also He* and

² Ibid., 19.

Communists by Georgi Markov. The reason for excluding them from this study is that there is only one published recollection about each one of them. Therefore, it cannot be established whether there is a conflict of remembering, and if there is, whether it is due to a difference in position (creators or witnesses), or to the respondent's desire to write a marketable autobiography.

Radoi Ralin and Valeri Petrov's *Improvisation* enjoys the most extensive analysis in the memoirs, as it was the big theatrical event from the period of tangible liberalization of spiritual life at the beginning of the 1960s. The production enjoyed extraordinary spectator interest and provoked a nervous and inadequate reaction from the authorities. It was promptly suspended from the theater's repertoire without any written order or explanation, a moment for which there are numerous stories in the memoirs, since all contemporaries preserve it in their minds as an exceptional experience. By the end of the decade, other theaters in Sofia and in the country produced problematic plays, subsequently repressed by the authorities, but their impact on theater artists and fans was not on the same scale as *Improvisation*.

The fact that plays like *Sky and Earth* by Kliment Tsachev, *Abel's Mistake* by Emil Manov, and *We Are 25 Years Old* by Nedialko Iordanov were sanctioned at the national review of Bulgarian drama and theater made them popular on the national scale. The critical publicity the three performances received, however, was not equivalent. *Abel's Mistake* and *We Are 25 Years Old* faced strong support both from the spectators in Dimitrovgrad and Burgas, as well as from theater critics and the wider circle of intellectuals both during the discussions and after the imposed sanctions. This was due to the prestige of the creators, the current topics that were skillfully interpreted in the script, and the performance, which received a high aesthetic evaluation from leading specialists. The case with *Sky and Earth* was somewhat different. Even though it boasted innovative stylistics, the poor literature material and the mediocre performance of the actors on the stage in Sofia made it both more difficult to defend, and predetermined its faster oblivion.

"Improvisation with Amputation"

In the early 1960s the new critical dramaturgical wave was just beginning to rise. Theater artists were under the strong influence of the warming political and cultural climate and were ready to give their best in order to preserve, and if possible continue, this positive trend: "Together with [the playwrights] Valeri and Radoi, says director Grisha Ostrovski, we wanted to support the warming, we thought, we believed, that we were called upon not to sit aside in silence, but to fight for that new climate as much as we could."³ "We thought that with our production

³ Ibid., 111.

[*Improvisation*] we would be able to support the processes of the so-called brightening," adds actor Veli Chaushev.⁴ Very soon, however, the play came to be referred to as "Improvisation with Amputation." Radoi Ralin's epigram from 1962, like other satirical texts of his, was attributed to the spectators.⁵ It expressed in synthesized form the conflict between theater artists and the authorities.

Hardly any documentary evidence has remained about the production. Exceptions are Nacho Papazov's report, read at the meeting of the Science and Culture Department of the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) with the management of the creative unions, editors-in-chief of the newspapers, the Bulgarian Telegraph Agency, the radio, etc., which took place on 1 April 1963,⁶ as well as Todor Zhivkov's report, presented to the Union of Bulgarian Writers, on 15 April 1963.⁷ The playbill is also preserved: a parody text, including "statements" by the authors, the director, composer, and artist, the "literature" used, instructions on the "correct" behavior during the performance and a "menu" from the theater's buffet. In addition, the final text is preserved in the archives of the Satirical Theater, on which the censors' notes can be seen, or more precisely, the censors' notes which had been requested by the governing authorities and then the corrections inserted by one of the creators.⁸ I am also in possession of a photocopy of the whole script, provided to me by Valeri Petrov, but have not managed to discover the final dramaturgical text. What episodes and what sketches have been performed can be inferred only from the actors' recollections.

It all started at the beginning of 1962, when Valeri Petrov and Radoi Ralin traveled to the writers' creative base in Khisaria, in order to write the script for a satirical variety show with the consciously selected title *Improvisation*. Their objective was to achieve such immediacy and lightness of the text that would suggest to the spectators the feeling that everything was being improvised on the spot. In fact the two authors are very different both in terms of personal character and artistic approach, and this difference was revealed in the writing of the separate scenes.

The composer Kiril Donchev defines *Improvisation* as "satirical spectacle..., eclectic..., composed of sketches, songs, dialogues, monologues."⁹ The actor Veli Chaushev in his recollections mentions "a humorous variety performance." He provides interesting data about the discrepancy between the initial idea and the play's realization:

⁴ Ibid., 119.

⁵ Dimităr Avramov, *Dialog mezhdu dve izkustva* (Sofia: Bîlgarski pisatel, 1993), 376.

⁶ TsDA, Fond IB, op. 5, a. e. 570.

⁷ Todor Zhivkov, *Za literaturata* (Sofia: Bîlgarski pisatel, 1981), 131.

⁸ Archive of the Aleko Konstantinov State Satirical Theater, Sofia.

⁹ *Gestus – Teatralen almanah*, 124.

According to the original idea the play would have been performed in three parts: First evening—parts 1 and 2; second evening—parts 2 and 3; third evening—parts 1 and 3. The script was long, it was impossible to perform in a single evening. It was clear from the beginning, though, that there would be some cancellations and gradually the separate scenes started to fit together into one performance. From the very first draft the concept of an open dialogue with the audience was present. At the left end of the stage there was a 2–3 meter platform toward the audience hall. I was entering the stage from the audience and along the platform, which destroyed the illusion of the “fourth wall.” Everything was boiling in one and the same cauldron—both actors and audience.¹⁰

Most actors, who have performed in the play, remember the contents of the scenes, in which they themselves took part. Chaushev, for example, tells about a suspended episode, containing a pun on the word “thaw”:

An Eskimo igloo, the Eskimos sit and shiver. One enthusiastic Eskimo rushes from the outside, shouting, “Brothers, come out! The thaw has started! The Ice is melting! Come on, everybody out!” Everybody rushes out, except for Grisha Vachkov who stays in the igloo. They ask him, “Why don’t you come out? A warming has begun...” “Well,” he says, “last year I went out and caught a terrible cold.”¹¹

For Itskhak Fintsi the play was “a composition of theatrical miniatures, united under the common title *Improvisation*. Some of them were written by Valeri Petrov, others—by Radoi Ralin. There were songs, scenes, sketches, made by the producer Grisha Ostrovski.”¹² Fintsi is the only actor to indicate the coauthorship of Ostrovski, something routine for the plays staged by this director. Vasil Popov remembers his part in an episode staged around “Song about the Guards of the Lighthouse” by Valeri Petrov: “In it, through the alternation of prose and verse, the expansion of the bureaucracy and the meaninglessness of some ‘important’ positions is revealed.”¹³ Tatiana Lolova recalls a sketch, ridiculing the appeal to economize on everything.¹⁴

In his memoiristic book *Bulgarian Literature of the Thaw Period*, Bulgarian émigré writer and translator in the USA Atanas Slavov defined *Improvisation* as “a play, consisting of separate episodes, connected through intermedia in the spirit of the show, all of which were in fact sharp criticism of the Establishment and the political means it used.”¹⁵ Most detailed and trustworthy are Dimităr Avramov’s memories, together with Radoi Ralin’s, who was a close friend of the renowned Bulgarian aesthetician. The entire text, related to the genre and contents of the play, is worth quoting as it provides extensive information:

¹⁰ Ibid., 118.

¹¹ Belchev, Rumen. *Satiritsite* (Sofia: Impuls, 2007), 93.

¹² *Gestus—Teatralen almanah*, 126.

¹³ Ibid., 129.

¹⁴ Belchev, *Satiritsite*, 93.

¹⁵ Atanas Slavov, *Bilgarskata literatura na razmraziavaneto* (Sofia: Khristo Botev, 1994), 152.

Improvisation was a brilliant stage improvisation. The subtitle tried in vain to make the genre more specific: "satirical variety show." Now it must be supplemented: for the first time in Bulgaria (I am afraid it was also for the last) the spirit of the variety shows, of the review in a torrent of cheerful and sad scenes, full of sparkling wit, of music, dances and songs, of circus performances and what not, for the first time ever the cheerful, as if the untroubled spirit of life-assertion and humanity was subordinated to most serious, and even fateful civil tasks. Like never before, the negative, malformed, vicious phenomena in our reality, in their overall horrifying specter were subjected to destructive criticism with laughter, music, and songs—without any order, genre hierarchy, subordination—just like that, as we were encountering them in our everyday lives: the harmful administration in the area of culture, the system of privileges, the metastases of corruption, the parade phraseology, obscuring the actual situation, the intolerance in discussions and the assignment of devastating political labels, the triteness of popular culture, the parvenu narrow-mindedness, the irregularities and carelessness in construction, the new omnipresent pickles Max and Moritz in the roles of leading economic, engineering, business, educational, diplomatic, etc. figures, the heartlessness and dangerous consequences of the bureaucracy, the tactics of our Tar-tuffes, the criminal absence of self-criticism in the governing bodies, their practical and complete disconnect from the people and their needs, the stupid and expensive overzealousness of the office-seekers, the rigidity and impossibility of personal initiative, the sad destiny of the scientists, unable to tell the truth even when they know it, the fatal power of delusions, transformations of cult psychology, the meaningless fear of punishment and sanctions, the suspiciousness and distrust, the lack of comradeship and genuine human relations, in this environment.¹⁶

It is difficult to firmly allege that all of the above mentioned issues were part only of the production and not of the original script, which was available to Avramov. Nevertheless, *Improvisation* can still be read as expressing the faith of the authors in artistic freedom, and as alluding to the main vices of socialism, evident already at the beginning of 1960s.

The difference in the authors' and witnesses' recollections about the play's genre and contents is obvious. It is interesting that even though the authors had themselves specified in parenthesis the genre as "satirical variety show," there was a certain hesitation by those remembering the play to use the term. Instead, they tended to talk about the genre in a descriptive manner. There is no conflict in remembering with regards to the contents. There are, however, evident differences in the stories of the authors and the theater critics. The more extensive information provided by the latter is due to both the analytical temptations of their profession and to the powerful reaction of spectators, during and after the performances. Everybody without exception, however, clearly remembered the enormous success of the play among the audience. *Improvisation* was among the most popular plays in its day and there are hardly any authors of scholarly texts or memoirs, related to the culture of the 1960s, who do not mention it.¹⁷

¹⁶ Avramov, *Dialog mezhdu dve izkustva*, 373–74.

¹⁷ Atanas Slavov in idem, *Bilgarskata literatura na razmraziavaneto*, 152; Dimitir Avramov in idem, *Dialog mezhdu dve izkustva*, 371–76; Maria Balkanska, Tatiana Lolova, Itshak Fintsi, and Veli Chaushev in Belchev, *Satiritsite*, 89–101; Grisha Ostrovski, Veli Chaushev, Maria Balkanska, Kiril Donchev, Itskhak Fintsi, Vasil Popov, and Konstantin Kotsev in *Gestus*—

Here are some recollections from actors and critics:

Improvisation exploded and literally shook the audience. There were no reviews about the play. Its popularity spread from mouth to mouth. It was not included in the palette of our major theater critics... Our theater was in its peak. People joked: "Why don't you sell the tickets for *Improvisation* in exchange for dollars at the KOREKOM?" There was a certain confessional element in the reactions of the audience. Not laughter, but exorcism of bad spirits—that's what the play provoked. Frequent attendees of the performance were Khristo Ganev, Rangel Vilchanov, Johnny Penkov—all of them friends of Valeri Petrov's. Now it's been almost forty years since that time, and *Improvisation* is still remembered. There is even a true story when two people met, fell in love, and got married because of *Improvisation*. He had one extra ticket, she was waiting in hope of buying an extra ticket in front of the theater entrance, they entered together, laughed and laughter brought them so close together that they remained together for the rest of their lives. (Veli Chaushev)¹⁸

Improvisation was an enormous success. The tickets for the play were like "foreign currency." If one got two tickets for *Improvisation* from the box office he could achieve a whole lot of things: get spare parts for his car, anything missing from the market. One could even obtain a court resolution, get through to a dentist or doctor, find lodging; one could do a lot. (Itskhak Fintsi)¹⁹

And I think that it won't be an exaggeration if I say that together with the General Art Exhibition of 1962, these were the two greatest and noisiest cultural events at the end of that turbulent year. *Improvisation* was a real feast of laughter. The laughter, the joyful mood—they started even before the beginning of the play—based on the stories, told by those lucky ones, who had already had the chance to see it. They were lucky, indeed, for obtaining a single ticket cost enormous efforts and nerve-wracking difficulties. "Fans" from other towns, from various parts of Bulgaria, came to see the play. (Dimitir Avramov)²⁰

Probably the strongest evidence for the huge popularity of *Improvisation* is contained in the recollections of Grisha Ostrovski:

Nobody who ever saw the play has ever forgotten it. Years ago I received a note through a colleague of mine from the director of one of the major plants in Ruse, who said that he was ready and willing to finance the restaging of the play. He wanted to see it again and he also wanted the new generations to be able to see it as well. However, the atmosphere of the time and of the play cannot be re-created. Alas!²¹

While there were no contradictions with regard to the popularity of the play, there were differences in trying to explain it. Both the director and composer

Teatralen almanah, 105–32; Ivan Sarandev and Valeri Petrov, *Literaturni anketi* (Plovdiv: Hermes, 1997), 171–73; Natalia Hristova, *Spetsifika na bilgarskoto disidentstvo: Vlast i inteligentsiia 1956–1989* (Sofia: Letera, 2005), 229–31, 249–51; Vladimir Migeu, *Bilgarskite pisateli i politicheskiat zhivot v Bilgariia 1944–1970* (Sofia: IK "KOTA" 2001), 195; Evgenia Kalinova and Iskra Baeva, *Bilgarskite prekhodi 1939–2002* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2002), 170.

¹⁸ *Gestus—Teatralen almanah*, 120.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 128.

²⁰ Avramov, *Dialog mezhdu dve izkustva*, 372.

²¹ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh*, 110.

focus on the rumor of the eventual sanction as the main factor for the immense interest of the spectators. Moreover, it becomes clear from the memories of Ostrovski that the inexplicable desire not to miss the show was observed also among high officials, prompting them to seek tickets through their "connections." This phenomenon can be explained mainly with the spirit of the 1960s, with the provocation, coming from the newness of the feeling of established borders and their violation, with the perception of life "as a show," even by some *nomenklatura* figures.

The conflict between critical intellectuals and the authorities is of course not particular to any specific time and place; however, its concrete manifestations vary across countries and time periods. At the beginning of the 1960s there were extensive discussions about the tangible liberalization of the political and spiritual climate. The theater artists reacted "appropriately" to the opportunities for free writing and talking, created by the authorities. "Appropriately" in the case of *Improvisation* came to be interpreted by the play's creators and participants as the need to help the party overcome the "personality cult" and the "lacquering of reality" by representing "actual life" with its entire contradictions and even its viciousness. Evidently in the beginning (during the preparation and the first performances of the play) their efforts were perceived in the same manner by the party leaders. However, their instinct for self-preservation and power was too strong, recently embodied by a new head of the BCP and the state: Zhivkov, a very skilled politician. This perhaps explains why their reactions were invisible and the sanctions skillfully and discreetly imposed, without a written ordinance, without public criticism. In 1963 *Improvisation* was irrevocably suspended.

The memoirs of the creators both reveal the complicated play (or outwitting) between them and the authorities and make visible the oppression exercised subtly upon the theatrical team through clever selection of the method to counteract the famous "satirical variety show."

In most of the published recollections, the authors insist on what the actor Konstantin Kotsev straightforwardly relates: "None of the actors thought that we were doing anything in defiance of the authorities. We just did our job, precisely as it was assigned to us."²²

These are positions remarkable for their lack of pretence and self-promotion. It must, of course, be taken into account that the memories were published in 2003, and were written not earlier than 2002, when the self-proclaiming of "heroes" and "martyrs" over the previous decade had provoked not only mockery, but also contempt. It is only natural that a producer like Grisha Ostrovski, a composer like Kiril Donchev (not to mention Valeri Petrov, who preserves complete silence on the issue), and also the actors, try to counteract this "new

²² Ibid., 131.

autobiographical wave” not with emotional talk about their popularity during *Improvisation*, but with a calm, factual, and objective assessment of the repression and their reaction to it.

Specific information regarding the problems has been given only by the producer Grisha Ostrovski. The first disconcerting signals came from what he calls “fans of the performance.” They started to avoid him and even stopped greeting him. Tension seemed to increase with each and every day. At the same time, the tireless Radoi Ralin started a telephone offensive directed toward public figures, asking questions like “Do you like *Improvisation*? What do you think of it?” He would persist until he got answers, although in most cases that answer came in some vague phrases. On a certain occasion one of the heads of the cultural department at the Central Committee applied the standard practice—tried to set the author (Valeri Petrov was at that time in Africa) against the director with the words: “Radoi, your text is very good, but Grisha has disfigured it!...” “Why! How? What?,” asked Radoi. “Well, take the ending, for example... The ending is pessimistic, somber.” Radoi Ralin, as can be expected, shouted at that high party clerk.

The situation around the producer, as he himself shared, continued to be normal—nobody asked him to go anywhere and no claims were raised against him. The authorities had chosen to act through Boian Danovski, the manager of the Satirical Theater,

an old adherent, associate, and member of the party. And that is precisely why he was the only one to serve as a scapegoat, without any consideration for his opinion, convictions, artistic intentions, and even civil positions. He was summoned for a conversation at the Central Committee. And one more time after that. What happened there nobody can say.²³

Boian Danovski invited Ostrovski to his office for a conversation. The entire story told by the Bulgarian producer reveals his sensitivity to, and compassion for, his close colleague and manager, but it is also a philosophical analysis of the time, of the customs, manners, and methods of the authorities. Despite Danovski’s forced aggressive tone and stern administrative language, and the accusations that Ostrovski assumed the pose of a “hero” and “martyr” uninterested in the faith of the theater, Ostrovski displayed firmness bordering, as he himself says, on cruelty. He refused to make any amendments to the text and offered Danovski to do it himself. Hurt and agitated, the manager did that. On the next day he announced the editing of the text—in front of the entire cast and crew.²⁴

At the end of his memoirs Ostrovski tells about “an ordinance from above based on which an internal meeting of the artistic staff was summoned to discuss and express a position regarding the play.” It cannot, however, be firmly

²³ Ibid., 115.

²⁴ Ibid., 116–17.

stated that that discussion has ever taken place. Ostrovski is the only one to mention it. Everybody else—the composer, actors, literary manager of the theater Maria Balkanska—expressly state (probably because they have been explicitly asked) that they cannot recollect any such meeting. It is possible, of course, that this was a conscious or subconscious forgetting, resulting from the pain caused by the situation. "Crocodile tears were pouring, everybody repented the short-sightedness that had allowed that text to be approved, what improvidence and cheap vanity possessed everybody, so that they could enjoy success, what triteness," etc., recollects the producer.²⁵

That discussion, if we trust Ostrovski's memory, took place at the end of 1963, after *Improvisation* was suspended from the theater's repertoire with the explicit consent (or under the explicit order) of Todor Zhivkov. At a dinner celebrating the fifth anniversary of the establishment of the Satirical Theater, the first secretary of the party and chairman of the Council of Ministers held an ironic discussion with Boian Danovski in his usual style:

After the fiftieth performance *Improvisation* was suspended without much ado. Todor Zhivkov made a joke in his usual style [at the anniversary banquet]: "Well, I heard that you discontinued *Improvisation*, ha ha ha..." Then Boian Danovski—the most elevated theatrical artist, the man whom we owe our formation and development—said: "Comrade Zhivkov, if you only knew how difficult it is to manage a satirical theater! If you and I could only change places..." Todor Zhivkov immediately interrupted him: "What! To change places! I also thought I was on this position just briefly, but I started to like it and I won't move from my place. You will remain manager of the Satirical Theater, and I—general secretary of the party!"²⁶

The memories of contemporaries and later researchers are quite different. Atanas Slavov states that after every case of pressure exercised by the authorities, the theatrical team responded by reworking whole scenes and introducing new episodes.²⁷ More reliable, however, seems the assertion of Kiril Donchev that "[t]he text was not amended."²⁸ Because he was one of the creators of the production and the composer of the music, it seems unlikely that he would forget an event of such importance that was related to his work.

Improvisation, both according to archival evidence and to published memoirs, was the first serious public conflict between theater artists and the authorities in the 1960s. Until the end of the decade tensions fluctuated, but they never escalated to official sanctions. This would cool down the confrontational edge of the more critically minded intellectuals and allow for the untroubled functioning of the political system. A rather precise and insightful explanation of this relationship is found in Vasil Popov's recollections:

²⁵ Ibid., 117.

²⁶ Ibid., 121.

²⁷ Slavov, *Bilgarskata literatura na razmraziavaneto*, 152.

²⁸ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh*, 2003, 125.

It is interesting that, as it seems, it was only with *Improvisation* that the management of the theater had fights with the “bosses” and it appears that this is what made it necessary to discontinue the play earlier. There were also other plays that could have been declared ideologically unreliable. However, we always managed to get away with it. We were not under very strong pressure. We were the *state* satirical theater. Todor Zhivkov was proud of us and praised us that after the Satirical Theater of the USSR, we were the second one in the entire socialist block. He bragged about us being critical. A demagogy, but it somewhat helped the theater to develop in its own way, according to its own means, to find its own artistic path. For those years of grayness and uniformity, this was something. And with us it was always both ways.²⁹

The Experimental Theater—The 1963–1964 Season

The possibilities for reactions in critical situations were different for the dramatic theaters in the countryside. Unlike their counterparts in the capital, they enjoyed neither the protection of the satirical genre, nor Todor Zhivkov’s “goodwill” (however symbolic). On the one hand, directors had to choose their repertoire from a list of acceptable plays issued by the Theater Department at the Ministry of Culture. On the other hand, the local town and district committees of the BCP exercised tight control over the production process. Theater artists, thus, had many obstacles and circumstances to overcome in order to stage a production that was both worthy as well as appreciated by the spectators. To this we can add that the preferences for one or another play were sometimes purely arbitrary. This becomes evident in the memoirs on three of the repressed performances from the 1963–1964 season: *Abel’s Mistake* by Emil Manov, staged and performed by the People’s Theater in Dimitrovgrad. Producer: Assen Shopov, scenographer-architect: Angel Akhrianov; *The Poet and the Mountains (Travel Notes in Two Parts)* by Ivan Teofilov, Theater of the Armed Forces, Sofia. Producer: Leon Daniel, scenographer: Mladen Mladenov, composer: Kiril Donchev; *Sky and Earth* by Kliment Tsachev, Drama Theater in Pleven. Producer: Boris Spirov, artist-scenographer Svetlin Rusev.

The scandal surrounding *Abel’s Mistake* started when the play took part in the Third National Review of Bulgarian Drama and Theater. On 10 June 1964 an emotional and highly critical discussion of the play took place where the accusation of “deviation from socialist realism” was leveled and it was suspended from the stage. The theater refused to engage in self-criticism and during the next season it was closed down and turned into a branch of the Drama Theater of Khaskovo.³⁰ The recollections about the play’s popularity are relatively short due to the overlap with the ones about the sanction, and the instant reaction of the audiences in Dimitrovgrad and Sofia to its performance at the

²⁹ Ibid., 130.

³⁰ Ibid., 23–24.

national review. The evidence about the atypically active defense of the play and the theater are indisputable proof not only of the production's popularity but also of an awakening latent resistance in the name of a just idea.

The recollections about all sanctioned performances from the 1960s reveal that during the preliminary round in the regional centers they were well received by the public and the juries, and even granted awards for stage production, scenography, and actors' performance. Obviously at this stage there were no suspicions of "ideologically incorrect positions" or "deviation from socialist realism," otherwise they would have neither been admitted by the controlling institutions, nor rewarded and sent to the final stages of the Third National Review, where official critics had the final say. This indicates that between the first and the second round something was happening and this was not necessarily unpredictable, given the standing conflict between the artists and the authorities.

Most of the facts in the recollections of the creators coincide, such as the rumors about the sharply critical orientation of the performance that led to the overcrowding of the theater; the presence of Todor Zhivkov and other supreme party leaders in the official box; Zhivkov's sharp reaction in leaving right after the performance; the missing information in the official newspaper *Rabotnichesko delo*; the several well-intentioned opinions of different representatives of the authorities before the discussions. There is no conflict in the stories about the active public defense of the theater following the resolution to disband it and turn it into a branch of the Khaskovo theater, as well as in the information for open counteraction by miners and engineers, made in their speeches and even by hooting against Todor Zhivkov during his visit in Dimitrovgrad.

The next production that received heavy criticism during the Third National Review in 1964 was *Sky and Earth*. The stigma of "ideological inconsistency" in this case was a cover-up for disagreements and intrigues within theatrical circles. The show was not suspended and performances were held in Pleven and in other district theaters. What is distinct about this play (and also about *The Poet and the Mountain*, to be discussed below) is that only the creators published their memories. This fact is indicative. On the one hand, it attests to their personal trauma as the sanctions had a strong emotional impact and direct influence over their future creative work. On the other hand, it confirms the direct link between cultural scandal and popularity. The absence of a scandal leads to missing or fewer memories about the event in the spectators.

What happened with the performance of *Sky and Earth* at the National Review can hardly be called repression and this explains the multitude of common recollections. There are no discrepancies in the evaluations of Kliment Tsachev's play, defined as poor literature. Everyone mentions the good partnership between the producer Boris Spirov and the artist-scenographer Svetlin Rusev, everyone remembers the enthusiasm with which they worked on the spectacle,

everyone is persuaded that the sanction came as a result of the malevolence on behalf of their colleagues.³¹ Everyone also remembers the poor acting performance in Sofia, everyone mentions with admiration Svetlin Rusev's speech in defense of the performance, delivered in the language and with the pathos of the young, educated intelligentsia who had already appeared with their free and modernistic works. The accent in the recollections is definitely on the experimental stylistics of the performance and particularly on the exceptional debut scenographic work by Svetlin Rusev.³²

The case with *The Poet and the Mountain* is to a certain extent similar to the other two repressed productions from the 1963–1964 season: the play was removed from the poster of the theater after its seventh performance. The officially stated reasons were ideological, but according to the creators' memoirs, ill-wishers inside the theatrical staff personally influenced Todor Zhivkov.³³ At the same time, this production was also quite different. Not simply because it had no relation to the Third National Review but because it was among the first innovative productions in the 1960s in all aspects from dramaturgy to producer's vision, scenography, musical lay-out, as well as acting. According to the recollections, the production enjoyed extraordinary success and was performed in front of full halls.

The authorities, however, were not prepared to permit such innovativeness and expression of creative freedom. This, coupled with the disclosures about a plot to carry out an armed *coup d'état* against Todor Zhivkov, organized by Generals Anev and Todorov-Gorunia,³⁴ better explain the repression of this particular production of the Theater of the Armed Forces. The minister of the People's Defense Dobri Dzhurov and the Chief of the Supreme Political Administration of the Bulgarian People's Army general Nikolai Chernev were acquainted with the extreme political situation and very well understood the reasons for the attack on the theater. As Mladen Mladenov recalls, during the last performance, the minister of culture Petăr Vutov indignantly turned to Dobri Dzhurov and asked him loudly: "Don't you see what this is?" Confused, but otherwise good-natured and well-intentioned, the general answered in the possibly most innocent and naive way: "Well, our actors are performing very well..."³⁵

The recollections about all three plays share some common themes: they dwell on the struggle to create experimental and innovative theater based on

³¹ Ibid., 184.

³² Svetlin Rusev, a representative of the group of artists from Plevan, was among the most gifted painters. He had been first noticed at the First Youths' Exhibition in 1961 in Sofia.

³³ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh*, 133.

³⁴ Ivan Todorov-Gorunia, a former guerrilla fighter, perished during the attempt to arrest him in 1965.

³⁵ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh*, 163.

contemporary topics; they mention the very good partnership between producers and scenographers; they criticize in retrospect the excessive emotional reaction; they analyze the "real" reasons for the sanction as opposed to the official ones. More importantly, there is an honest attempt to reconstruct the events accurately and to demystify the facts, circumstances and consequences of the cultural-theatrical scandals from the first half of the 1960s. Claims of "martyrdom" and "heroism," as already mentioned, are worn out and discredited at the beginning of the new century. Interestingly, the pendulum of recollection and self-identification does not swing backwards toward reconciliation or idealization, but slows down and becomes fixed on the general social and cultural milieu and the individual's role in the specific recollection.

The Grand Finale

Nedialko Iordanov's play *We Are 25 Years Old*,³⁶ staged at the Drama Theater of Burgas in the 1969–1970 season, was also sanctioned, this time at the Fourth National Review of Bulgarian Drama and Theater. At first glance, this play—if only for chronological reasons—may be called "the final chord" or "the grand finale." A more important reason, however, is the dramatic tension at the end of the decade, created as a result of the consequences of the watermark year 1968. With regards to Bulgaria, there was another significant jubilee—the celebration of the twenty-fifth anniversary of 9 September 1944 in 1969.³⁷

The scandal surrounding this production was almost as big as the scandal around *Abel's Mistake* and the reasons were the presence and similar reaction of Todor Zhivkov at the concluding performance in Sofia; the vehement criticism in the press; and above all, the demonstrative overwhelming support by the audience. In the recollections on the play the main motif is the aspiration toward objective reporting of the events without narratives of martyrdom. At the same time, colleagues accused of toadyism are concretely named. For instance, scenographer Angel Akhrianov both in 1990 and in year 2000 could not miss the opportunity to share his recollection about Boian Balabanov—the author of the praised by Zhivkov play *Birds Fly in Two*. In a speech Balabanov gave right after a performance at the People's Theater during the Fourth Theater Review, he reportedly said:

³⁶ Producer is Asen Shopov, scenographer-architect Angel Akhrianov.

³⁷ The date 9 September 1944 was of such major significance during the socialist period that it was engraved on the state coat of arms alongside 681, the year of the establishment of the first Bulgarian state. This designation prompted an apocryphal jocular reading of the coat of arms as an obituary notice, marking the year of birth and the year of alleged death. This ironic touch proves the ambiguity of life during socialist era, but it does not diminish and could not diminish the strength of official ideology.

Please excuse me, Comrade Zhivkov, but last night while watching this disgrace [in reference to *We Are 25 Years Old*] and while I was observing all the snobs of Sofia gathered in one place to applaud this disgrace, I thought—Good gracious, isn't there anyone to throw a bomb into the National Theater? We will all die, but at least the snobs will go with us as well.³⁸

Much more detailed, factual, and emotionally colored are Iordanov's recollections, shared in his memoiristic novel *Zdravei, Az*.³⁹ Here for the first time the writer describes the real event which had given him the idea for his play: a party he attended organized by a supreme *nomenklatura* official in "the governmental residential block on Lenin Boulevard—extremely luxurious for its time. With a doorkeeper. With a huge foyer and several elevators... It was the first time that I found myself in such opulence."⁴⁰ The complete recollection of Iordanov's experience from that evening sounds frank and authentic, without any attempt to color it with contemporary emotions and assessments. He mentions both his perplexity and indignation at the Western furnishings, the Western drinks, the snobbishness and the unscrupulous behavior of the guests—a way of life completely foreign to the ordinary Bulgarian. At the same time, he also records his subsequent realization that things are not as they seem to be at first glance: at midnight the young people became engaged in quiet, intellectual discussions.

This event provides the plot for his play, revolving around the lives of two generations: of fathers in the year 1944, and of their sons and daughters in 1969. All of them are at the age of twenty-five in the two respective time periods. The roles are performed by the same actors. The main idea is that no matter how different their ideals and lives are, fathers and children ultimately resemble each other both in their mistakes, and in their aspirations. "I will not hide it—I wanted to show that I am able to write 'party' plays as well," Iordanov states honestly.⁴¹

Like the audience in Burgas, the jury at the regional review in Plovdiv and the critics initially expressed their positive assessment of the play. The situation significantly changed after the performance on 19 June 1969 at the People's Theater during the final stage of the Fourth National Review. Todor Zhivkov was present, accompanied by Stanko Todorov, Pavel Matev, and other Politburo members. Zhivkov's reaction was both expected and unexpected. It was expected because, as all the creators of the play mention, he had just returned from a meeting in Moscow where the events in Czechoslovakia had been discussed

³⁸ *Gestus—Teatralen almanakh*, 218.

³⁹ Nedialko Iordanov, *Zdravei, Az* (Sofia: New Media Group, 2007), 403–44.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 407.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 403. His ambition was sharpened by the flop of his previous plays *We Don't Believe in Storks* and *Hope for Tomorrow*. The latter was denied permission by the Ministry of Culture to be staged in the Soviet Union.

and where a resolution had been taken about the suppression of the political and sociocultural life. It was at the same time unexpected, because the main accent of the play was on the valuable continuity between the generations, even though the twenty-five year olds in 1969 were realistically and provocatively represented as passionately dancing the Twist and demonstratively dressed according to the Western fashion.

According to Iordanov himself, the reason for Zhivkov's reaction could be a misunderstanding about one of the dialogues between two characters in the play:

Ani: He may be alive. He certainly is alive. What do you think, is he alive?

Rositsa: Even if he is alive, you won't recognize him. He will be fifty years old. And probably he is gone bald-headed. And with a belly..."

"Here the applause," goes on Iordanov, "was frenetic and all eyes turned to the box upstairs. Upon my word, I did not mean for Todor Zhivkov to appear then, but that is how it came out."⁴²

There is no factual discrepancy in the recollections of all creators and contemporaries regarding the subsequent fate of the play. In their narratives the extreme dramatization of the repression is absent, and one can discern an attempt to explain it with the realities of the time. Iordanov's more extensive narration is due both to the genre in which it is related, and to the interweaving of this episode with a personal, as well as a worldly plot. In an interview I took with him in 2009, he elaborates even more specifically on his assessment of cultural life toward the end of 1960s. I will quote from it extensively below:

Question: The story in your memoirs about what had happened with *We Believe in Storks* is quite consistent. What would you say today, in the summer of 2009, about the intellectual climate and cultural life in Burgas during 1966?

Answer: It was a wonderful time. [I was] twenty-five years old! An absolute "rebel," not thinking about any consequences whatsoever. The beard. The Beatles. The dangerous play. The dangerous poems. The pleasure of electrifying the audience which is standing in lines for tickets at the theater's ticket office. The editorial articles in the newspapers. The secretary in ideology. The threats...

Generally speaking—one lives an interesting life, one is resisting. And there is what to resist. One is taking the risk. Young people admire you. The old people are indignant. Slight vanity, but a clear conscience that you are doing something useful.

Golden days. It will never come back. At that point, the theater in Burgas, the Bulgarian theater in general, were the only place where one could utter some truths. And the people were mad about theater. The theatrical performances were the rehearsals for the first demonstrations of democracy. That was the place where many and different people in the theater hall would react boldly and applaud, one single word even. This could not happen anywhere else.

And now who goes to the theater to hear something prohibited?

⁴² Ibid., 426–27.

Question: Can I ask you the same thing about *We Are 25 Years Old* during 1969?

Answer: That was very serious. A slap in the face... Todor Zhivkov to make a personal demonstration [of his displeasure] at the end of the performance! In the leading articles there were fearsome assessments. To quote from memory: "The play is propagating the apocalypse and the collapse of communist ideas among our young people..." For such offences they used to send people to the camps. And me—they simply fired me from work. And after half a year they restored me to the theater. The times were unstable—freezing, unfreezing, and freezing again. In fact, that is how our lives were lived and our creative work was done—but, thank God, it did not have an impact on what we were writing. On the contrary, it was nice.

In conclusion, if we try to generalize about the evolution of postsocialist recollections *vis-à-vis* the theatrical repressions of the 1960s, we can observe with sufficient certainty that the emotions and the extremely negative assessments about socialism have subsided. In addition, the drive to proclaim someone (or oneself) as a hero or martyr has also diminished. Finally, one can perceive a tinge of nostalgia for bygone youth and for the lost rebelliousness, and a slight bitterness, tending toward disappointment from life and the possibilities for creative realization today.

23. Bulgarian Intellectuals Remember Communist Culture

Vasil Markov

My childhood went under the sign of socialism. A child perceives but does not rationalize. So my memories of socialism were later imported from family members' stories. Most of these stories tended to repudiate the past; others were nostalgic, but there was always a before and an after. When my academic adviser, Prof. Natalia Hristova, approached me with a proposal to take part in the project, I responded from the position of someone who has both witnessed an event and is unable to recollect it. I decided to eschew the notion of collective memory in favor of subjective memories—multiple and diverse—in order to trace the personal stories and dramas of those who felt compelled to narrate them as if following the famous dictum that those who do not remember the past are condemned to repeat it. I regard my research as a labor of excavation. Isn't uncovering memory an archeological process after all?

The present chapter analyzes recollections about cultural events from the communist period in Bulgaria published in the newspapers *24 chasa* and *Kultura*.¹ Since I am primarily concerned with how cultural phenomena are represented and rationalized, I look at the recollections of representatives of the culture elite—men and women of letters, critics, artists, theater and cinema professionals. I aim to explain the logic of the recollection by establishing the way in which the memory about communism in the transition period (1989–2007) is publicly amended and constructed. The underlying assumption is that memory is not unified but articulated with different strength during the years of transition. The emphasis is thus on how the post-1989 sociopolitical and cultural context shaped the recollection and its expression. Therefore, I trace

¹ While it is impossible to cover the whole press from the years of the transition, these two newspapers have entirely different approaches and reading publics and represent the two opposite poles in the recollections of (and cultural debate about) the communist past. They are also symptomatic of the polarization between “high” intellectual, and “low” popular taste.

the recollection in its development and change from "the big remembering" at the beginning of the transition to its fading away or modification in the last few years.

The Postcommunist Press and the Memory of Communism²

After the end of the communist period in Bulgaria, the problem of memory became central. The democratic changes unlocked memories that had been blocked by the regime and the public space became flooded with narrations and interpretations. The first ones to respond to the impulse to talk about the socialist past were journalists and memoirists.³ The questions "What have I gone through?," "How do I remember it?," "In what way is it significant now?" were frequently raised in the mass media. These recollections are inseparable from the context of the transition period. One usually talks about the Bulgarian transition as a macro event with an open end; it is known when it started, but it is not clear how long it will last. During these years of slow change the memory of events before 1989 were stated in different ways and with different degrees of candor. Since the present influences the way in which we narrate past events, what events we reproduce and how they are assessed depends on the specific moment, circumstances, and context of the recollecting. It is important, therefore, to trace how memories change over time.

There is a multiplicity of memories about socialism. As Ivailo Znepolski noted, postcommunism is "an area of collision of different private memories about communism that are unrestricted by the commonly accepted conceptual frame."⁴ Consequently, according to him, the socialist "truth" has dissolved into a multitude of truths without common criteria and points of support. More importantly, this logic of fragmentation settling into the mass media, is not simply becoming a symbol of democratic change, but to a certain extent is constructing the very space of the transition.⁵

² Throughout the text, I will use the terms "communism" and "socialism" interchangeably. It should be noted, however, that the majority of Bulgarian scholars, taking part in the project "Remembering Communism," stated their preference for the term "socialism."

³ Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, "Istoricheskite refleksii na bilgarskiiia prekhod," in *Istoricheskata nauka v Bilgariia. Sistoianie i perspektivi*, eds. idem (Sofia: Dîrzhavna agentsiia "Arkhivi," 2006), 267–68. According to the authors this could not be the historians, since they lack the time distance needed to reconsider the period that has just elapsed.

⁴ Ivailo Znepolski, "Komunizmî—miasto na pamet bez obshta oporna tochka," in *Okolo Pier Nora. Mesta na pamet i konstruirane na nastoiasheteto*, ed. idem (Sofia: Dom na naukite za choveka i obshtestvoto, 2004), 128.

⁵ Idem, *Novata presa i prekhodî: Trudnoto konstruirane na chetvirtata vlast* (Sofia: Druzhestvo "Grazhdanin," 1997), 11–12.

After 1989 the appearance of the mass media in Bulgaria sharply changed. Among all means of communication, print media was the first to react to the spirit of the new times and initiate the policy of free expression. Prior to 1989, newspapers were subordinated to the state machine and served more to propagate official ideology, rather than express public attitudes. On the whole, censorship restricted free and adequate information and the number and quality of printed materials. Conversely, after 1989 state monopoly and direct political control over the press faded away. This created the conditions for an independent private press. Freedom of speech, restricted for decades, found active expression in the rapid proliferation of postsocialist newspapers,⁶ which turned into a lively space for analyses and discussions, clashes of interpretation, and real political, but also cultural debates.

In addition to the plurality of newspapers, another sign of democratization was the new dependence on the market. While during socialism the press was based on a common, ideologized model, now each newspaper had to look for a special niche and readership. Only with a similar “segmentation of the audience”⁷ the differences between *Kultura* and *24 chasa* become apparent—two publications, a weekly and a daily, occupying the two poles in the varicolored mosaic of the postcommunist press. These two newspapers have not only different audiences, but also different histories. The popular daily *24 chasa* started two years after the democratic changes. By contrast, *Kultura* had a solid background as the successor of *Narodna kultura*, published from 1957 until the beginning of 1990. Thus one newspaper embodies the new press, a product, but also a powerful motor of the transition, while the other one’s long biography points to direct continuity with experience from the past.

When *Narodna kultura* (People’s culture) changed its name to *Kultura* (Culture), this signified both a new direction and at the same time the metamorphosis of a well-established newspaper with an inspiring heritage and a voice of its own. The new editor-in-chief Koprinka Chervenкова published an article, symptomatically entitled “This Is Not a Manifesto,” where she asserted that the cultural weekly would refrain from the hysterical crossing out of its past. Instead, it would inscribe itself in the new dynamics of the time by continuing to inform about significant cultural events and the activities of intellectuals. These intentions sounded justifiable, keeping in mind that before 10 November 1989 *Narodna kultura* was already a newspaper with a flamboyant civil position, hosting a multitude of discussions on the problems of cul-

⁶ For comparison, during the months just after 10 November 1989 two new newspapers appeared, while during 1994 their number exceeded 400. Todor Petev and Liliya Raytcheva, “Promeniashtiat se medien peizazh v Bŭlgariia,” in *Bilgaro-germanskii sbornik*, No 2. *Zhurnalistikata dnes i utre* (Sofia: UI “Kliment Okhridski” and FZhMK, 2001), 185.

⁷ Ibid., 187.

ture and intellectual life.⁸ Over the years, *Kultura* has developed its own style and preferred themes in the fields of art, literature, cinema, and theater. It is mostly concerned with discussions of cultural events and phenomena, both domestic and international, but also publishes articles on humanitarian action. Despite its small print run, the newspaper has secured a narrow, socially distinct readership and has imposed itself as the most influential tribune of the intellectual elite. After the changes it has become a serious forum, where sociologists and political scientists have been debating the transition. Thus it is a natural place to examine the recollections of the Bulgarian intelligentsia about the period of socialism.

Totally different is the position of *24 chasa*. If *Kultura* has established itself as a publication of the intellectual circles, the mass daily paper relies on an aggressive type of journalism, where the news is central, delivered in slang and with a taste for sensation. It was the first newspaper to advocate the liberation of language and concepts. During the first years of the transition, the appearance of this type of newspaper was an absolute novelty. With its direct expression and tabloid style of reporting, it brought about a "small cultural revolution"⁹ by breaking socialist and postsocialist taboos, and imposing new writing standards, expression, and style. The first issue appeared in April 1991 in a tabloid format and was crammed with news. The individual entries were short and very close together as if merging into one another, while the sole analysis was ironically published on the last page under the heading "Introductory Article." Within the next few years *24 chasa* increased its volume from 4 to 16 pages and became the newspaper with the largest number of printed issues (its leadership lasted until 1997, when *Trud* displaced it). Provocative and accessible, it came to symbolize "the changes" and the free spirit of the new times.

For many the history of *24 chasa* is "the history of the new Bulgarian press."¹⁰ The new model it introduced (succinctly expressed in the paper's motto "A Daily newspaper about the news, whatever it may be"), was soon adopted by all daily newspapers in Bulgaria. The idea of replacing the analytical journalistic discourse with neutral, concise, and brute presentation of facts belonged to Valeri Naidenov, founder, ideologue, and long-time editor-in-chief of the newspaper. At the end of 1989 Naidenov published an article in *Narodna*

⁸ According to Natalia Hristova, in the period 1986–1989 *Narodna kultura* was a newspaper which "influenced positively the overall Bulgarian intelligentsia, as it stimulated thinking, provoked critical consciousness" (Natalia Hristova, "Vestnik *Narodna kultura* 1986–1989," in *Tolerantniiat natsionalist: Pameten sbornik ot priiatelite na Staiko Trifonov*, eds. Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova [Sofia: Paradigma, 2009], 340).

⁹ Rosen Iankov, "Kratka istoriia," in *24 chasa. Vestnikit*, eds. Georgi Lozanov, Orlin Spasov, and idem (Sofia: Trud, 2001), 13.

¹⁰ Ivan Krıstev, "Kritika na tabloidnii razum," in *24 chasa. Vestnikit*, eds. Georgi Lozanov, Orlin Spasov, and Rosen Iankov (Sofia: Trud, 2001), 81.

*kultura*¹¹ wherein he subjected the whole postcommunist press to merciless criticism condemning it as nonobjective and “discouragingly boring.” He criticized Bulgarian newspapers for writing in first-person singular, something inadmissible for the Western press, which would inform and not comment upon. The reform Naidenov pushed for aimed at the complete withdrawal of the author: “It seems that the author is absent. He is modest to the limit and absolutely neutral; he does not allow even a particle from the language to reveal his partiality and even his presence.” Instead of conveying the position of the reporter, the newspaper should supply information objectively and impartially. Only such separation of fact from assessment was seen as fit for the conditions of the transition.

24 chasa turned this “pure news” journalism, relying on sheer transmission of fact without conveying the author’s position, into its brand. The published materials are short, almost anonymous and without intellectual pretense. Street language is adopted as a conscious effort at differentiation from the journalistic discourse of socialism and also as a strategy for maximum impact. Colloquial and undisciplined, saturated with words of Turkish origin and unusual constructions (the famous reverse word order), this language is deliberately rude. The aggression is directed against the existing social and literary norms and received ideas about what was admitted and prohibited. As noted by Orlin Spasov, “the overall main activity is transferred on the level of language, which by itself is turned into the important spectacle and thus into the thing which sold best.”¹²

By overstepping the norms of the language, *24 chasa* sought to attract the ordinary Bulgarian by offering an alternative to elite newspapers. In contrast to *Kultura*, it is markedly anti-intellectual and even when events from the cultural life are presented, consumption and entertainment remain in the foreground. The targeted readership is extremely wide and socially heterogeneous. Spasov characterized it as a “hybrid tabloid”: one that eclectically combines the serious and the popular, very often within the same issue and even on the same page.¹³ It becomes clear that *Kultura* and *24 chasa* are two publications with completely different styles, approaches, and rhythms. It is logical, therefore, to expect that two independent, diverging versions of intellectuals’ memories about cultural phenomena under communism shall be formed. When intellectuals make their recollections accessible to the public, it is significant how and where the recollection is articulated.

¹¹ Valeri Naidenov, “Presata i reformate,” *Narodna kultura* 51, 22 December 1989, 4–5.

¹² Orlin Spasov, “Ot politikata kîm grazhdanite,” in *24 chasa. Vestnikî*, eds. Georgi Lozanov, Orlin Spasov, and Rosen Iankov (Sofia: Trud, 2001), 92.

¹³ Idem, *Prekhodî i mediite* (Sofia: UI “Sv. Kliment Okhridski,” 2000), 52–53.

The Recollection as Politics of the Intellectual Elite—*Kultura*

The events from November 1989 did not immediately introduce abrupt changes on the pages of *Kultura* (at the time still called *Narodna kultura*). The weekly remained true to its analytical tone and subject matter. At the same time, among the usual articles on culture, some pieces on the current political situation appeared. The 24 November 1989 issue was particularly emotional. Under the headlines "Work and Deeds!" and "Changes!" its introductory articles appealed for immediate (but not hasty) actions for qualitative reforms and mobilization of the total population—all this expressed in the kind of rapturous language that was the hallmark of the first days of the transition. In the same issue a survey appeared—"Inevitable Monologues"—where Bulgarian intellectuals answered the question "How should we live in the future?" It becomes evident that 10 November 1989 brought about exhilaration from the leave-taking with the "inhuman, suffocating regime," but also painful uncertainty about what was to come. The survey is indicative not only of this initial mixture of insecurity and optimism, but also of *Kultura's* first attempt to look back upon the past more retrospectively, albeit still very timidly.

Over the following months, personal and emotional confessions, tinted with the burden of traumatic experience, dominated in *Kultura* and guided the public perception of the near past. In autobiographical narratives or interviews, Bulgarian intellectuals remembered the censorship and repression, the suspended films and forbidden books, the dismissals from work, the suppression of civil and creative freedom, and the general atmosphere of oppression under socialism. Not surprisingly, the traumatic wave of recollections in *Kultura* started with the story surrounding the publication of Zhelyu Zhelev's book *Fashizmât* (Fascism). In 1982 when the monograph was published, it provoked a real cultural scandal because the author consciously drew comparisons between fascism and communism. Its condemnation resonated strongly with both the intelligentsia and the broader public. After 10 November 1989, *Fashizmât* came to be seen as a symbol of Bulgarian dissent and the spirit of the changes.

Kultura published a story about its incrimination by Evtim Evtimov, who at the time was the editor-in-chief of the publishing house Narodna mladezh. Evtimov reminisced with sad humor about the injustice of the suppression, referring to it as "an unhealed wound." The story about the suspension of *Fashizmât* was first of its kind in *Kultura* and it provoked a passionate discussion. In the same issue, the newspaper offered Dimităr Shumnaliev the opportunity to respond and he obliged by attacking Evtimov's heroic pathos. Such a reaction was unsurprising, especially at the beginning of the transition, when many people were prone to dubious self-legitimation and poorly performed martyrdom. It also served to illustrate the double nature of memory and the subjective narrative—some facts were discussed openly while others were kept in silence or

buried in oblivion. *Kultura* saw its mission as providing the space for debate and the collision of positions.

After 10 November 1989 complete rejection of the former regime was the common frame of mind. In this context, intellectuals close to the regime became a major target of attacks. On the one hand, such public condemnation was justified, even though it was not always reputable. On the other hand, the alleged apologists of the Zhivkov regime were people with a personal drama, who chose conformism and compromise instead of the perils of defending their opinions. In all such cases the recollections are directed against a certain personality. Thus, Nikolai Panaiotov in his article “Power and Fine Arts” drew attention to the Union of Bulgarian Artists. Its chairman, Svetlin Rusev, was bitingly accused of being a skillful manipulator and “mediocre” sycophant, an artist belonging to the *nomenklatura* who imposed his monocratic dominion. Similarly aggressive and accusing are the narratives about “the executioners of books” Slav Karaslavov and Nikolai Khaitov. Narratives like these are very detailed and abound with facts. One feels in them the traumatic memory and a tone of martyrdom as well as the wish to emotionally suggest the existence of an opposition—between executioner and victim, between the underprivileged creator and the *nomenklatura* oppressor. At the beginning of the transition a large number of Bulgarian intellectuals preferred to take the position of a speechless victim and martyr, and turn their reaction toward socialism into a personal revenge.

Without accusations, but no less painful is the memory of Lily Vermut about the strange spiritual metamorphoses of Bogomil Rainov. Prior to 9 September 1944 he had been a passionate defender of modern French art but then in 1949, when the French embassy organized an exhibition of contemporary paintings from France, he was totally transfigured: “It was an exciting event for Sofia. They announced that Bogomil Rainov would give a speech during the discussions. I took the students from the whole course in the Academy, as well as all my friends to listen to the man who was knowledgeable and understood this art! We gathered tightly around him in order not to miss a word. Bogomil completely denied everything exhibited in the hall as works of art, even the impressionists! He repudiated everything with some unthinkable phrases, which obviously were not his own, but sounded as if the latter were borrowed from provincial newspapers! I couldn’t believe what I saw. This was the first shock in my life. The man who was standing in front of me was someone else! But in the name of what and why had he changed?”¹⁴

For others the reality of socialism was the reality of an absurd world destroying ideals and smashing the individual. *Kultura* duly reacted to this traumatic wave with a number of texts under the heading “Theatrical Debacles.” The attention to theater was not accidental as the dramatic arts had been espe-

¹⁴ *Kultura* 14, 6 April 1990, 5.

cially active in socialist times as an important space for public discourse and influence (including an important space for expressing radical ideas). Vili Tsankov elaborated on this in his autobiographical narrative. After the Burgas theatrical group of Leon Daniel, Vili Tsankov and Iulia Ognianova was disrupted in 1961, the situation within the theater harshly deteriorated. The authorities were trying to prevent such groups from acquiring any popularity. As Tsankov recalls, censorship in the theater was extremely harsh and the party critics were vigilantly keeping an eye out for ideological mistakes. Authorities would impose strict sanctions on producers who dared move away from the realist line. Because of the impossibility to speak openly, theater artists were forced to use "Aesopian" language, veiled in coded messages and allusions. In his recollection, Tsankov related a whole sequence of conflicts and scandals, accusations and threats, which eventually ended with the utter defeat of the activity of the Youth Theater where he was working at that time. However, his goal was not to look for retaliation, but rather to objectively reconstruct the events in order to reassess them.

Angel Akhrianov looked at the theatrical debacles of the 1960s in "The Abel Affair." This article, a mixture of documentary sketch and personal story, reproduced the scandal around Emil Manov's play *Abel's Mistake*, which was staged at the theater of Dimitrovgrad in 1963–1964. The production enjoyed a great spectator interest, but soon it was condemned as a "piece of art which contradicts the most essential principles of socialist realism."¹⁵ Not only the theatrical, but also the cinematographic "debacles" became the focus of recollections in *Kultura*. In an interview Liudmil Kirkov talked about the dreary fate of two of his movies *Kratko slince* (Brief sun) and *Ravnovesie* (Equilibrium): one was discontinued, the other was reedited. In spite of the atmosphere of insecurity and the constant maneuvering with the authorities, he refused to consider himself "repressed" and pronounce himself a hero. Instead, he chose to use bitter irony in reference to the "abnormal" life during socialism.

Rangel Vilchanov was even more categorical in his refusal to accept the position of the victim and martyr. According to him, such an attitude is neither fair, nor humble. To him, "even the ones who most tenaciously insist on declaring themselves dissidents" have been publishing, expressing themselves in one way or another, and striking compromises with the authorities during communism. The guilt from those years is collective, so that today "we can ask for an apology, but not to exculpate ourselves."¹⁶ Rangel Vilchanov had every reason to declare himself as having been repressed by the regime, but he preferred not to seek retaliation. If he returned to the past it was only to rationalize it from the point of view of today: "What happened—happened,

¹⁵ *Kultura* 18, 4 May 1990, 7.

¹⁶ *Kultura* 46, 16 November 1990, 5.

whoever survived—survived, whoever perished—perished. Let us not pick bones with one another. The question is to find a reasonable way for us to behave in the future.”¹⁷

In the mid-1990s *Kultura* increasingly started publishing materials, which instead of summoning the memory of censorship, repression, and punishment, focused on the short intervals of “thawing” and cultural animation. This shift was evident in two types of recollections about the creative circles in the 1960s. The first one pertained to the writers’ atmosphere in *Literaturni novini* (Literary news)—a newspaper of an antidogmatic bent, one of the cultural “sparks” at the beginning of the 1960s, published from 1961 to 1964. With much sympathy and frank nostalgia, Simeon Vladimirov narrated moments from the life of the newspaper, evoking a feeling of community and friendly relations. The second one, too, referred to a collective, comradely, and creative community, this time in the theatrical circles. In memory of director Iordan Sariivanov, who perished tragically in 1972, his friends Krasimir Spasov, Nikolai Poliakov, and Krikor Azarian shared their recollections in *Kultura*. Reminiscing about Iori—“the human being, rebel, and idealist”—they also talked about the intellectual atmosphere of the 1960s, about how Bulgarian theater artists, hoping for change, were embracing the ideas of European drama (and particularly the so-called “Czech miracle”) and desired to incorporate them into their own ideology.

This type of recollections about socialism focused on the complicated and contradictory relations between the intellectuals and the authorities, when moments of cultural relaxation took turns with the tightening of the intellectual climate. The way in which the tactics of the authorities changed with regards to the cultural elite is described in the narrative of Vladimir Svintila about the period around and after the 1956 April plenum that resulted in a temporary (and, ultimately, illusory) “thawing” of the controls dominating cultural activities. This was the time when the link with pre-1944 traditions was still alive and contacts with Europe were not completely cut off. Svintila recalled that at the time intellectuals were talking about Picasso, Kafka, and Joyce, while he himself was receiving free books from the French publishing house Gallimard. The cultural revival of 1956 soon bore fruits. Authors like Vasil Popov introduced new poetics in literature. Ballet and poster art flourished, while the center of intellectual life became Bambuka, a café where artists, writers, composers, and producers gathered and talked. The authorities tolerated these activities and granted provisional respite, which increased the artists’ and intellectuals’ self-confidence and their hopes that they would be able to express themselves freely. But this liberalization was rather transient. Soon the illusions collapsed and the frightening repressions returned. It is not

¹⁷ Ibid., 1.

coincidental that Svintila related a shocking recollection about 1958—after he had refused to join the ranks of the Bulgarian Communist Party, he was forcibly “cured” in a psychiatric clinic.¹⁸

Yet, in another recollection, turning back to the so called April years, Svintila spoke about them with a certain nostalgia, emphasizing the shared feeling of continuity, and the link with tradition, in contrast to the present transition. Toward the mid-1990s, when the difficulties of the transition became still more evident and artists experienced severe economic problems and isolation, a redefinition of the communist regime began to take shape, tinged with nostalgia. The economic and political crises after 1989, the discrepancy between the changes proclaimed by the ruling elite and their implementation aroused disappointment, social tension, and craving for the (presumed) security of socialism.

It is in this context that an unusual article appeared in *Kultura*, titled “I Miss the Plenums,”¹⁹ in which the author pathetically lamented the loss of the Committee for Culture with its numerous plenums, from which a “life-asserting and constantly rising level” of intellectual activity was streaming. He was missing the elated directives, the congress reports, Todor Zhivkov’s paternal care for the young artists, even the totalitarian rhetoric and the party slogans. The author further declared that “the crystal clear idea about the management of culture” and Bulgaria’s large-scale cultural revival “on world level” were all lost. At first glance the appearance of such a text in *Kultura* was striking and inexplicable, all the more so as the author, Liuben Ruskov, was one of the active editors of the newspaper. But even if we question his sincerity, we can hardly dismiss his motive in writing the article as absurd. The confusion and the chaos of the Bulgarian transition were so overwhelming as to bring about nostalgia for the “calm” years of socialism.

Ruskov’s nostalgic article in fact put an end to the “big remembering” in *Kultura*. From then on, people would write about communism very seldom and mostly in connection with a specific occasion, such as an event, publication, or anniversary. In 1998 Nevena Stefanova published “Excerpts from the Notebook.”²⁰ These were notes in the form of a diary, provoked by events in the cultural life. The poetess did not hide her indignation and sarcastic reproach toward her fellow poet and party favorite Lyubomir Levchev, who in his memoir *Ti si sledvashtiit* (You are next) presented himself as a misunderstood victim. These notes were written almost ten years after the changes, when the memory of communism was fading away, and they were provoked by a specific occasion (the publication of Levchev’s book). With the passing of time, the

¹⁸ *Kultura* 19, 10 May 1991, 5.

¹⁹ *Kultura* 40, 30 December 1994, 2.

²⁰ *Kultura* 30, 31 July 1998, 8.

memory of communism is slowly withering away. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, fewer and fewer people are able to remember it, including those who experienced it.

Recollections about Communism in *24 chasa*

In *24 chasa* there were no traces of the emotional traumatic initial reaction on the pages of *Kultura*. This was perhaps due to the delayed appearance of the newspaper, which only started in 1991 and thus was not in existence to capture the moods of the first days of the change. Another reason had to do with the differing objectives of the two newspapers. The memory of repressions and punishments was definitely present in *24 chasa*, but it was looked upon as a source of scandal and sensation. Since the main goal was to command mass public interest, this also applied to the politics of remembering. To differentiate itself from *Kultura*, *24 chasa* avoided the autobiographical narrative and made the interview its preferred genre *vis-à-vis* the years of socialism. In many cases the interviews were reworked, retold, or excerpted and mixed with expressive commentary by the journalist in such a way that a question arises in the reader's mind: To whom does the recollection belong—to the interviewee, or to the newspaper itself? Much more so than in *Kultura*, the recollections here were perceived not only as personal, but also as mediated and refracted through the language of the printed media. Communism was first mentioned around 1992. The euphoria surrounding 10 November 1989 was gone and the impulse to erase and deny the former regime was mitigated. Bulgarian intellectuals started looking ahead. Atanas Svilenov stated that parting with the totalitarian stereotypes was to be a long and difficult process, but after the stage of "slogans" and "the euphoria of rallies," the time of "analytical meditation, of reasoned argumentation would ensue."²¹

For intellectuals, the preserved memory of repressions and punishments was still very vivid, but it had to be shared and rationalized. The newspaper accordingly gave information regarding the attitude of the authorities toward the intellectual elite. The intimidation tactics most often applied by the authorities were devastating reviews in the press, discontinuing films, closing down exhibitions, dismissing people from their jobs, and banning certain kinds of participation in the cultural life. For instance, in one article directors Irina Aktasheva and Khristo Piskov recalled how after their 1966 film *Ponedelnik sutrin* (Monday morning) had been declared decadent the directors were not permitted to shoot another film for almost ten years. Sometimes the measures the authorities undertook on the ideological front acquired absurd and comic dimensions. Ilia

²¹ *24 chasa* 157, 2 July 1992, 10.

Velchev, for example, related that when his film *Mandolinata* (The mandoline) was supposed to be shown at a festival in Mannheim, in order to prevent the Western public from viewing a "dissident" Bulgarian movie, the authorities sent an empty reel box.²² In other cases, the disobedient artists were translocated and interned.

How, according to the recollections in the popular daily, did intellectuals react to censorship and strict prohibitions? For many of them there was no other way but to accept stoically their fate and to survive at the price of staying silent or making compromises. The case with Dimităr Dimov, who had to rework whole pages from his novel *Tyutyun* (Tobacco), is broadly known but it is not the only one. In an interview for *24 chasa* Tsvetan Marangozov admitted that he had been forced to rework his first novel *Bezrazlichniat* (Indifferent) by abridging paragraphs and replacing the tragic end of the main character with an optimistic ending. Eventually, Marangozov emigrated—a practice that was not very common. Faced with the prospect of an uncertain future abroad, most artists chose to engage in a dangerous game with the authorities: a game of attempting to outwit them by embracing self-censorship and the use of allegoric "Aesopian" language.

Thus, in order to survive, many intellectuals had to suppress their creative independence and adapt to the requirements of regime. This was the key drama of the Bulgarian intellectual under socialism, aptly summarized by Blaga Dimitrova:

How sad was the role of our colleagues—the censors, who were recruited as editors. Among them we had friends. They had to go against their own profession, against their literary ideal. And further on, they had to intrude in the work of their friends.... They were torn between their sense of poetry and the clerical position of being censors. This was a perfect way to crush the artists in Bulgaria.²³

Judging from the intellectuals' recollections in *24 chasa*, the intelligentsia under communism was not a homogenous entity. Rather, each individual adopted an attitude that best corresponded to his artistic and civic position—of open disagreement, compromise, or accommodation with the regime. The tactics employed by the authorities were also different: from intimidation and repression to softer attitudes and even tolerance. Zhivkov's reign was characterized by a not particularly refined flirt with the intelligentsia, wherein threats were followed by promised privileges, and punishments by awards. Khristo Ganev, however, perceived this as a clever strategy for the depersonalization of the Bulgarian intelligentsia.²⁴ Khristo Khristov, Khristo Piskovs, and Irina Ak-

²² *24 chasa* 140, 29 May 1993, 23.

²³ *24 chasa* 243, 5 September 1997, 13.

²⁴ *24 chasa* 177, 26 July 1992, 10.

tasheva admitted that they had been offered a full rehabilitation in exchange for making a film about one of the party idols (Dimitir Blagoev or Georgi Dimitrov). Their refusal meant isolation from official cinema life and the inability to make films. Theater artists enjoyed the greatest degree of attention from the authorities, particularly that of Zhivkov. They were the ones most enthusiastically wooed and at the same time most vigilantly under surveillance. According to recollections found in both *24 chasa* and *Kultura*, the head of state personally attended the premiers of theatrical plays, stayed for the subsequent receptions, and established contact with the creators of the performances, including those who were deemed “formalists.” Generally speaking, “the flirt” with the intelligentsia was both subtle and manipulative. Pavel Matev ironically characterized Zhivkov as “a chess player of high rank”: “He had no idea about poetry. He had a calculating mind. He used people like pawns.”²⁵

Zhivkov’s skillful manipulation of the intelligentsia was a theme discussed only in *24 chasa*, in unison with its taste for sensation and juicy detail. The interviews in *24 chasa* were refracted through the language and style of the journalist, and the recollections fall under the heading “Rise and Fall.” A portrait of the interviewee is drawn by highlighting the absurdities of socialism. Particular attention is paid to the fact that these individuals had once been active in the cultural life but were presently completely cut off from it, neglected or totally forgotten (as indicated by ludicrous subtitles such as “An Artist Ran Away to the Countryside as a Hermit—Now He Is Not Even Touching a Pencil or Brush; Instead He Is Milking Goats and Growing Tomatoes”). In this way a distance from the past is conscientiously maintained and it is endowed with the aura of a relic. The “rise” marks the period prior to the changes and even if one speaks about repressions, the idea is not to claim martyrdom, but to unveil presumably unknown, curious, and disgraceful information.

In these interviews, socialism was often evaluated from the position of the communist-idealist who is pained by the discrepancy between the proclaimed ideal and the reality. Going back to period following April 1956 and his poem “The Executive Committee Is in Session,” Khristo Fotev exclaimed: “Who was not in such a state of euphoria then? This sounded so tempting, that the people should be equal in the social sense of this word, that there shouldn’t be poor people, that everyone should have an equal start.... I am still supporting these issues.”²⁶ The confession of Pavleto for *24 chasa* is concordant: “I have never been against it [communism], nor against the Soviet Union. But I have always been against the Asian nuance in Soviet-style communism and against the distortion of the ideal.”²⁷ It is paradoxical that a similar opinion, of a regime that

²⁵ *24 chasa* 41, 12 February 1994, 25.

²⁶ *24 chasa* 81, 27 March 1993, 26.

²⁷ *24 chasa* 113, 30 April 1993, 30.

betrayed the original ideals of equality and unity (which date as far back as Plato and Christ), was voiced also by the "darlings" of the authorities, such as Lyubomir Levchev and Bogomil Rainov.

Edvin Sugarev similarly proclaimed today's self-isolation of the men of arts and lamented the loss of the collectivist spirit:

During those times, a union of men of arts existed, which was prepared for acts of solidarity, for purely human relations among its members. Something that nowadays is missing.... At that time, the man of art was a spokesman for social ideals. Today, this is missing. Nowadays, there are some wonderful writings about freedom, but they have no meaning, because no one is reading them. The authors are writing them for themselves only.²⁸

The nostalgic tone was dominant in the recollections in *24 chasa* especially among painters, since they felt the crisis of the transition most acutely, both economically and socially. Pavleto preserved the label "true art" for the years of socialism, while today's artists, according to him, were neither productive, nor motivated to create new works of art.²⁹ Encho Pironkov similarly stated that "over the last forty years, visual arts in Bulgaria experienced true flourishing and many artists managed to realize their potential. Maybe because at that time the necessary conditions existed and the state was generous to them and supported them materially."³⁰ Until 1989 high artistic culture was maintained, but this was impossible in the conditions of the transition. Artists were missing the material security and the "affection" of the state.

The nostalgic recollections in *24 chasa* in a way mirrored the ones in *Kultura*. The difference is that the ones in *24 chasa* were more detailed and engaged more topics and periods. The era of Stalin and the cult of personality in particular were the most often evoked, despite the distance in time. Khristo Ganev spoke about the Chavdar partisan brigade. Gencho Stoev returned to the post-1944 situation in the countryside and to his open refusal to support the new regime. Traian Radev's autobiographical confession was the recollection of political victimization centering on events of 1948 because of the monarchist past of his father, Simeon Radev. In most cases, the journalist asked the leading question about the first years of socialism, thus provoking a narrative about this particular period. This curious detail sheds an important light: the newspaper not only shaped and gave voice to the recollections, but to a certain extent also caused them.

To what extent *24 chasa* constructed the recollection can also be seen from the newspaper's strategy to relate conflicting (but actual) storylines in biting language, mostly with an eye for scandal. A case in point was the dispute around the acrostic "Down with Todor Zhivkov," rekindled three times in the

²⁸ *24 chasa* 274, 7 October 1995, 51.

²⁹ *24 chasa* 113, 30 April 1993, 30.

³⁰ *24 chasa* 1, 3 January 1994, 10.

newspaper (1994, 1998, and 2003) with an intensity similar to the one when the “heretical” verse first appeared. In 1985 *Pulse* magazine published a poem titled “Esen” (Autumn) signed by Margarita Petkova. The editors immediately recognized the impudent hidden message: the first letters on each line constituted an appeal for the overthrow of the “First man.” The poetess denied having written the acrostic. In a series of interviews *24 chasa* searched for the truth. Some admitted with pseudo-heroic pathos that the disgraceful verse had sneaked through by their hand, others stated that they knew the name of the author but would not divulge it. The person behind the appeal remained a mystery, and *24 chasa* had an interest in sustaining it.

In an article that was more of a journalistic investigation than a recollection, Kristina Patrashkova sought to unravel the truth about the “Zhivkova Circle,” the cluster of eminent intellectuals associated with the daughter of Todor Zhivkov at the end of the 1970s (such as Bogomil Rainov, Svetlin Rusev, Alexandr Lilov, and Alexandr Fol) and that involved the aberrations of occultism and Agni Yoga, as well as the mysterious death of Lyudmila Zhivkova. Patrashkova was essentially interested in the fate of this circle after 10 November 1989—How much was it remembered (or forgotten) and what were the paths these intellectuals took? One of the most vivid and controversial recollections was that of Bogomil Rainov. He remembered Lyudmila Zhivkova as a tolerant, original individual with an antidogmatic attitude: a real phenomenon in Bulgarian cultural life during socialism. Thus, Rainov expressed the hope that from the distance of time “people will fairly evaluate her unusual role as a champion of causes that are yet to happen.”³¹ Such is also the position of *24 chasa*. In its attempt to resurrect a story about a “mythologized” and “god-chosen” circle of intellectuals, the newspaper in fact gave it a positive evaluation, distinguishing it from the acts of the former regime. In the confused years of the transition, the above-mentioned members of the circle took different roads (some isolated themselves, others forced their way into political life) and eventually *24 chasa* brought them back together on its pages and gave their past together a new lease of life. It is not by accident that Patrashkova titled her article “The Zhivkova Circle Was Revived.”

The article on the Zhivkova Circle in *24 chasa* marked a sharp contrast with recollections in *Kultura*. By 2002 interest in the communist past had completely faded away in the pages of *Kultura*. The period (consciously or not) was no longer recalled, and the names of intellectuals like Bogomil Rainov were not even mentioned in the cultural weekly. By contrast, *24 chasa* attempted to present different viewpoints, to multiply the standard postsocialist memory of communism by relating the recollections of intellectuals close to the authorities. In the period from 1993 to 2006 the newspaper published five interviews with Rainov in which

³¹ *24 chasa* 149, 1 June 2002, 26.

he tried to dismiss defamatory accusations against him and improve his public image. The fact, however, that these confessions sounded more like self-justifications provoked the question whether they were an honest attempt on behalf of the writer to face the burden of the past and his own conscience. Rainov categorically denied having acted as "the censor of the republic" and even alleged that he himself was often forced to apply self-censorship and compromise his creative vision. To counter the reproaches that he was a party ideologue, Rainov painted an image of himself as a victim, a reversal of the social roles as they occurred in most interviews. Perhaps it speaks as much about the uneasy rationalization of a personal biography as about the internal drama experienced by the writer of the nomenclature. Ultimately, Rainov balanced his role by proclaiming himself as simultaneously a perpetrator and a victim ("while among the artists I was rebuking modernism, among the writers I myself was punished for my modernistic poetry") and explained his devotion to the regime with his fanatic belief in the communist ideal. Interviews conducted with the intellectuals Lyubomir Levchev and Georgi Dzhagarov present analogous situations. Similar to Rainov, both tried to counter their public image as "favorites" of the authorities by refashioning themselves as suffering victims. Such interviews are revealing about the mechanisms of public remembering. Again, it was the journalist who raised the question about personal guilt and confronted Rainov, Levchev, or Dzhagarov with their past as "courtiers" to the authorities.

Yet another round of interviews was dedicated to one of most popular and controversial postcommunist topics, dissidence. Bulgarian intellectuals are far from unanimous on this issue. An emblematic figure, Zhelyu Zhelev declared with open self-confidence that he was a dissident already at the beginning of the 1960s, "earlier than the dissidents in Czechoslovakia and Poland." According to him a dissident was everyone "openly standing against the ideology, the policy, and the practices of the political regime."³² Therefore, being internally opposed to the regime was not sufficient and the dissident necessarily had to be an anticommunist who openly and actively criticizing the regime. Svetlin Rusev was more moderate. To him "dissidents" did exist, but after 1989 many people exploited the designation for their own benefit.³³ Many of the intellectuals, however, denied the existence of true dissent in Bulgaria. Tsvetan Marangozov sarcastically put it:

Dissidence begins behind the bars and the barbed wire and it requires full rejection of participation in the regime. Whereas all the time I hear: but we believed in the idea. Did they believe in the tribunal murders, in the death camps, in the need for terror? If they believed in anything, it must have been their own survival.... In Bulgaria there are dissidents with Dimitrov awards, with villas and beaten tracks to the West already during Zhivkov's time.³⁴

³² 24 *chasa* 242, 4 September 1997, 11.

³³ 24 *chasa* 16, 19 January 1999, 9.

³⁴ 24 *chasa* 41, 12 February 1994, 30.

Conclusion

This study of recollections of Bulgarian intellectuals about the socialist period focused on materials from two representative newspapers, occupying the two poles in the periodic press after 1989. While *Kultura* is the “intellectual” newspaper, spokesman of the moods and positions of the cultural élite, *24 chasa* is “the newspaper of the people,” where the writing style is accessible and the “ordinary” Bulgarian is catered to. These differences in strategy reflect differences in how each speaks about the recent past.

It would be unfair to state that the cultural debate of the transition years was waged predominantly in *Kultura* (being the most influential tribune of the intelligentsia). On the contrary, it was *24 chasa* that offered intellectuals the opportunity of remembering communism in a number of interviews. Whether because it was a daily publication or because of the efforts of its journalists, *24 chasa* offered a lot more space to recollections and over a longer period of time (1989–2007). Thus the memory of communism in *24 chasa* was more diversified, and it addressed more themes and periods. The attitudes toward the past in the two newspapers also diverged. To take the theme of the repressions, sanctions, and punishments, a theme amply present in both publications, for *Kultura* it was an occasion for traumatic sharing of the experience, whereas for *24 chasa* it was approached as disgraceful or curious fact. *24 chasa*, contrary to *Kultura*, gave an opportunity to the men and women of the arts close to the authorities to talk about their “transgressions,” something that they would not have initiated if they were not sought after and invited to do so in an interview. Therefore, somewhat roughly put, if *Kultura* was the newspaper of shared memories, *24 chasa* was the newspaper of provoked recollections.

Whatever the differences between the two, they share one aspect in common: communism is not remembered as a uniform concept. Rather, what is remembered and commented upon is not communism as a political system, but the years of communism as woven from the complex, contradictory, and shifting relations between intellectuals and the authorities. The sanctions and dismissals are remembered, but so are the awards and bribery, as well as Zhivkov’s flirt with the intellectuals. The censorship (or self-censorship) is remembered, but at the same time the memory of the friendly circles and the comradely community is also alive. In this sense, the memory of communism is multiple and complex: it is never only negative or only approving, eliciting total rejection or nostalgic summoning.

24. “By Their Memoirs You Shall Know Them”: Ivan and Petko Venedikov about Themselves and about Communism

Iliana Marcheva

The relationship “scholar-political regime” and the limits of the admissible compromises, which every intellectual sets according to his/her own ideas about morality, should be of considerable interest to any scholar, at the very least for the purposes of comparison with other fellow-workers. I was interested in those questions, being myself a student of socialism, and especially as a result of my participation in a project at the Institute of History at the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences in 2004–2005. The project dealt with how “the changes” reflected upon the discipline of history in the 1980s. The emphasis was on the survey “Historians about History,” which sought to explore the correlation between continuity and change in the field of history in a former socialist country during the time of transition. Summarizing the results, I was confronted with a peculiar tendency, namely the ability of some colleagues to distance themselves in their assessment of Bulgarian historiography under socialism, as if they themselves had never worked within the same paradigms at that time.

Such aberrations are not at all uncommon among scholars. In fact, they are to be seen even more clearly in memoirs. There, unlike in the brief questionnaire, the author can dwell at large on his/her viewpoint and explain his/her professional stands. It was particularly illuminating to read and analyze the memoirs of scholars who built up their reputations during socialism, but were perceived and considered themselves to be “victims of the regime.” Such were the views of the archeologist Ivan Venedikov, whose scholarly works, as well as memoirs I had already read. But in the course of the research I came across the memoirs of his elder brother Petko. It was even more intriguing to analyze the reflections of two intellectuals coming from the same family, who were looking for a new identity during the transition of the 1990s while remembering their lives under socialism. Thus I had the opportunity of working on a micro level by juxtaposing the two brothers. While keeping in sight the larger questions about the relationship between power and intellectuals and how it shifts over time, in the end I was convinced that “by their memoirs you shall know them.”

The brothers Ivan and Petko Venedikov come from an old and renowned family of well-known intellectuals, military men, and politicians closely related to bourgeois Bulgaria and the political right, Macedonia, and the future agrarian opposition. Their father, Iordan Venedikov (1871–1957), a major general in the reserve, a military historian, and theoretician, had graduated from the Military Academy in Torino and had participated in the Ilinden-Preobrazhenie Uprising of 1903, the Balkan Wars, and the First World War. Other members of the family included their cousin, journalist Milka Genadieva-Beauf, and their uncles, the politicians and journalists Pavel and Dr. Nikola Genadiev, who were leaders of the National Liberal Party and were related to the writer Aleko Konstantinov.

No less famous was Ivan Venedikov himself (1916–1997), whose academic career and intellectual presence coincided with the communist period in Bulgaria. He worked as a curator and research associate at the Archaeological Museum from 1945 to 1973, and then from 1973 to 1978 as a senior research associate in the newly established Institute of Thracology. Until his retirement in 1986 he was in charge of the Department of Antiquities in the National Museum of History. At the same time he lectured at the St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia, where he was appointed professor in 1981. Ivan Venedikov has published over 150 articles and books about the history and culture of the Thracians and Proto-Bulgarians. He wrote widely about the eastern impact on Thracian culture, restored the prototype of a Thracian chariot, and became one of the leading specialists of Thracian studies. This period of ancient history in the Bulgarian lands was highly valued during the 1970–1980s and became part of cultural propaganda during the tenure of Lyudmila Zhivkova (1942–1981) as Politburo member and chair of the Committee for Art and Culture. Ivan Venedikov's works greatly influenced younger scholars; together with Prof. Alexander Fol he also organized the Institute of Thracian Studies. His research into the life and culture of Proto-Bulgarians also contributed toward an increased awareness of the significance of this ethnic group in medieval Bulgaria. Venedikov was one of the founding members of the National Historical Museum in Sofia in 1978.

His older brother, Professor Petko Venedikov (1905–1995), was a well-known jurist from the period before 9 September 1944, an expert on Roman, estate, and contractual law, and dean of the Faculty of Law from 1942 to 1944. He was known as an attractive and knowledgeable professor, whose lectures were attended by students from all departments. In 1949 he was dismissed from the university and worked as a lawyer and translator.

Ivan was happily married to the ethnologist Vera Venedikova. They had two daughters, one of whom is the well-known Ottomanist Ekaterina Venedikova. Petko married twice, his second wife being a student of his, twenty years his junior. Having been accused of being a "fascist," she was not allowed to finish her higher education for a long time. Of his three children, two of his sons also

became well-known scholars. Angel Venedikov became a well-known Bulgarian geophysicist, corresponding member, professor, and DSc in Physics and Mathematics, while Jordan Venedikov was a renowned mathematician-statistician. His daughter Teodora, who lives in Germany, founded a publishing house bearing father's name, the Prof. Petko Venedikov Publishing House. Their biographies reveal that the two brothers were born into an environment of intellectuals. They developed as individuals and scholars during the bourgeois period, but a large part of their active life unfolded during the communist period. However, while Petko's career effectively ended during communist rule, Ivan's career was more squarely rooted in this period. Their children also developed as scholars during the communist period.

The Venedikovs saw the fall of communism and lived through the period of transition to democracy and capitalism. Their memoirs about themselves and the time they lived through spanned three historical periods—the interwar period, the communist period, and the period of transition to democracy. Ivan Venedikov's book of recollections was published in 1993 and is one of the earliest memoirs of a renowned scholar and intellectual from the communist period.¹ Out of a total of 413 pages, 148 are devoted to communism. Petko Venedikov's book, which bears the rather neutral title *Spomeni* (Recollections), was published only in 2003 and is supplemented by parts of Petko Venedikov's state security file consisting of 92 pages. Out of a total of 559 pages, 146 deal with communism.²

For a number of different reasons, both memoirs are incomplete. Ivan Venedikov deliberately published only the first part of his memoirs during his lifetime, reaching the year 1964. According to his daughter, he was not in a hurry to publish the remaining parts because they concerned colleagues who were still alive at that time. When, in 2009, I asked her why she did not publish the rest, she said that his papers must first be brought into order. In another conversation she (as a historian) expressed her suspicion that memoirs are rather unreliable sources of information. She also pointed out that her father had published other works in the 1990s besides his memoirs. Venedikova clearly was reluctant to publish the remaining parts of Ivan Venedikov's memoirs.

The memoirs of Petko end suddenly around 1970 with one sentence, which is not accompanied by any further explanation on the part of the editor, his daughter Teodora Venedikova: "The memoirs of Prof. P. Venedikov (1905–1995) remained unfinished."³ Petko Venedikov's state security file shows that the Venedikov family felt stigmatized under the communist regime. It is not by

¹ Ivan Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im. Bilgarskata inteligentsia v moite spomeni* (Sofia: Khr. Botev, 1993).

² Petko Venedikov, *Spomeni* (Sofia: Prof. P. Venedikov, 2003).

³ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 550.

chance that the state security documents were published in the form of a facsimile in order to ensure that readers would fully grasp the extent to which Petko and the entire family suffered from a sense of inferiority and rejection under the communist regime on account of their origins and ideology.

These documents provide evidence that Petko Venedikov was regarded as someone with right-wing political beliefs as the leader of the student "profascist" and nationalistic organization "Khristo Botev" and the Bulgarian National Student Union. He had maintained close relations with the legionaries (The Union of the Bulgarian National Legions) and their honorary leader General Nikola Zhekov, and with Prof. Lyubomir Vladikin, who collaborated with Alexander Tsankov, whom the Nazis appointed prime minister of the Bulgarian government in exile in 1944. All these organizations and activists pursued pro-fascist activities and were banned after 9 September 1944. Venedikov was accused of persecuting left-wing students before 1944, and after the war of pandering to students by awarding them high marks. He was said to be related to well-known right-wing politicians such as the Genadiev clan from the Liberal Party, Dimităr Petkov (who was the best man at his parents' wedding), and his son Nikola Petkov, the opponent of the Fatherland Front (FF). His brother Ivan was said to be a supporter of the fascist government who worked as a senior research associate in the Archaeological Museum, where he was known to be a capable scholar. Records about Ivan were kept because he had been an active member of the nationalist All-Bulgarian Union "Otets Paisii," but since no "enemy acts" were recorded after 1944, his file was terminated. In the last published document of 28 May 1960 it was suggested that Petko Venedikov too should be "taken off record," that is, no longer observed. The surveillance was indeed discontinued. Suspicion that he had taken part in a plot that aimed to overthrow the government was proven false, and the document states that since he regarded his dismissal from the University of Sofia as the deed of "interested people," he did not feel offended by the "people's government."⁴

This information proves that the Venedikov brothers had genuine reasons to feel persecuted, for they had been placed under close surveillance by the communist government as representatives of the so-called former political and cultural elite. When the elite of the country changed, they had to find a new role in society and follow new rules and regulations in order not to lose their status as intellectuals. It was therefore logical that the brothers felt free to write down their memories after the fall of the regime and, more importantly, to make them known to the public. Of course, in spite of their wish to be sincere, they were prone to a natural inclination to distort their memories by overrating their personal role and soiling the reputation of their opponents, and therefore ran the risk of falling victim to their own ignorance or prejudices.

⁴ Ibid., 549–50.

These pitfalls, while acknowledged, are not the focus of analysis in this study. Rather, by juxtaposing the memories of two brothers from the old elite, we may gain insight into how they lived under communism, how they adapted to communist society, and how they coped with their past after the end of the communist regime. When were their recollections written down? Did they influence one another? What motivated them to write down their memories? What structure and content did their memoirs acquire? How did each of them remember the same events that marked their private, family, and public life? In my analysis, I tried to distinguish between their positions as witnesses, contemporaries, and participants in the events in order to determine the influence of collective and official memory on what was remembered and forgotten.⁵ For this the diary of Evdokia Peteva-Filova (1901–1980), the wife of Bogdan Filov, the prime minister of Bulgaria's pro-Nazi government, was brought in as a corrective⁶ alongside interviews conducted in 2009 with two scholars, Ivan Venedikov's daughter Ekaterina Venedikova and Maria Chichikova, an archeologist and witness of what took place in Bulgarian archeology in the late 1940s and 1950s.

As noted above, the two brothers wrote their memoirs after 1989. In the preface to his book, Ivan mentions that the fall of communism urged him to reassess his life and scholarly career. His brother does not indicate when he decided to write his memoirs. Judging by comments about current events or names of popular politicians at that time, such as Iordan Sokolov (the chairman of the National Assembly) or Stefan Savov, Petko probably wrote his memoirs between 1990 and 1992.⁷ Ivan Venedikov's daughter mentioned that, although they lived under one roof, she had no recollection of hearing that her uncle was also writing his memoirs. Still, it is very likely that the memoirs of the two brothers were written at the same time and that Petko had the opportunity to check and use Ivan's memoirs, although he does not mention it in his text. Ivan's recollections may also have been influenced by the conversations he had with his brother. Strangely, neither of them mentions the other's memoirs nor do they write about each other. Ivan is casually mentioned in Petko's story in relation to the contacts he had in the "Bulgarian Writer" publishing house, which provided Petko with the opportunity to publish a legal brochure;⁸ and there is no mention of Petko in Ivan's story, except in a passing reference to a professor who was dismissed from the university in 1950.⁹ At the same time, both brothers provide information about the third brother, Dimităr, and about

⁵ Petar Hutton, *Istoria kak iskustvo pamiati* (Sankt Peterburg: VI. Dal, 2003), 333, 404.

⁶ Evdokia Filova, *Dnevnik, May 1939–August 1944* (Sofia: Khr. Botev, 1992).

⁷ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 431.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 524.

⁹ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 383.

their sister, Bistra Gerasimova. Petko even mentions that he was not going to write about Mitko, because he was writing a memoir himself.¹⁰

In the context of the wave of memoirs that emerged after the fall of communism in Bulgaria, the memoirs of the two brothers are typical of the anticommunist memoirs of the "former" people, although each of the works encountered a different public fate due to the different dates of publication. The first half of the 1990s was dominated by memoirs of people considered to have been oppressed by the communist regime. They corresponded closely to public attitudes at that time, as well as to historians' wish to fill in the blank spaces of history and of public memory. This was the time when the memoirs of bourgeois politicians like Atanas Burov, Nikola Mushanov, Stoicho Moshanov, and Konstantin Muraviev were being published, as well as the diaries of Evdokia Filova and the memoirs of Tsaritsa Ioanna, not to mention the memoirs of people from the communist elite who had been deposed by Todor Zhivkov. In 1995 Vera Mutafchieva edited *The Trial of the Historians*. This book contained documents revealing the initial repression of bourgeois historians who had been accused by the new Fatherland Front government of "great Bulgarian chauvinism" and "fascism."¹¹

The recollections contained in the published interviews, documents, memoirs, and diaries of repressed cultural and political figures in the first half of the 1990s could be seen as a continuation of the disclosures about the outrages committed in the name of communism from the final phase of perestroika. However, while the Bulgarian public became familiar with the scandals surrounding the lives of the Soviet intelligentsia, political emigration, or repressed politicians in the period of glasnost, only in the 1990s did they learn about their Bulgarian counterparts. Ivan Venedikov was one of the first people who removed the veil of silence about the fate of the Bulgarian intelligentsia under communism with his book. It was immediately accepted as an important source throwing light on the transformation of historical scholarship under the communist dictatorship.¹²

These memoirs were followed by the memoirs of historians who had occupied leading scholarly positions, such as Ilcho Dimitrov and Dimitir Angelov, as well as the diary of academician Nikolai Todorov. The memoirs of very popular historians such as Nikolai Genchev and Vera Mutafchieva were also published. They came out in the latter half of the 1990s and at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and continued the tendency to present figures from the Bulgarian historical and cultural elite during communism in nonheroic terms

¹⁰ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 417.

¹¹ Iliyana Marcheva, "Spomenite na komunisticheskata nomenklatura sled promenite v Bulgariia ot kraia na 80-te," *Istoricheskoto bideshte* 1–2 (2005): 117–19.

¹² Nadia Zhivkova, *Usmiriavane na razuma* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2003).

and to reveal how hard it was to carry out creative work, both for scholars burdened by their family pasts and for people who came from the new working-peasant intelligentsia. By the turn of the century the social confrontation had declined and political passions began to abate. This is probably why the publication of Petko Venedikov's *Spomeni* in 2003 did not provoke the public response produced by the publication of Ivan's memoirs ten years earlier.

By contextualizing the memoirs of the Venedikov brothers in the early 1990s it becomes possible to identify their openly stated and hidden motives. Only Ivan Venedikov explains why he wrote his memoirs. In his preface he explains that, immediately after the changes in 1989, the time had come for reckoning, for taking stock of his development as a scholar. Memory, as a reflection of what he had managed to achieve in science, served as a starting point for passing on ideas to the new generation of scholars. At the same time it was necessary to look at the conditions, family background, and scholarly circles that had given rise to his achievements. In other words, Ivan regarded his memoirs not only as a balance sheet of his life, but also of his scholarly development: "Now, when little by little age is distancing me from science, I would like to give these memories yet another meaning... I would like not only to note what point I have reached and what I have done, but also what I have still not managed to do and would probably be unable to do."¹³ Petko Venedikov begins his memoirs, without clarifications, with a sentence that is characteristic of an autobiography: "I was born on 23 December 1905 in Sofia," followed by the names of his father, mother, and godfather.¹⁴ The most typical motive of memoirists is the wish to situate themselves in time and to identify themselves. The Venedikovs wrote their memoirs at the time when communism was collapsing in the early 1990s, the period of most intense revanchism that led to the rehabilitation of the "former" people. The Venedikovs therefore had to declare loudly and in public how they had managed to survive under communism, which they never supported.

However, one cannot explain the motives of the two brothers simply in terms of their desire to situate themselves in the communist period and to describe survival under that regime. The writing of memoirs appears to be a family trait, for their father, Major General Iordan Venedikov, also wrote memoirs. The third brother, Dimităr, Ivan's twin brother, who took part in the occupation corps in Serbia during the war, and who later joined the Macedonian National Liberation Brigade in 1944 and lived illegally in Macedonia until he came back to Bulgaria in 1958, also wrote memoirs, which are still unpublished. Their sister Bistra also made a family tree of the Venedikov family. According to Ekaterina Venedikova, so many members of her family wrote memoirs because they belonged to a cultural milieu that descended from priests. Ekaterina herself

¹³ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata*, 5–6.

¹⁴ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 5.

gathered information about the Venedikov family. Writing memoirs fulfilled an inner need for each family member's self-expression. It was this family tradition as well as the conventions of the genre that explains why the two brothers did not write only about life under communism. They recount their lives more generally, so that we become acquainted with the families of their parents, their childhood, adolescence, and careers before being introduced to life under communism. In this way they give priority to their individual memory, inflating its importance alongside the official memory from the time of communism.

Although the two brothers adopted a common narrative formula, there are significant differences between the content and the structure of their memoirs, which result from their different destinies, natures, and motives. In the case of Ivan, memory is expressed more clearly as a resolute act always followed by speculation. He regarded his memories as a reflection on the destiny of the representatives of the Bulgarian intelligentsia in general. This reflection is not flattering, just as his memories about most Bulgarian scholars in the book are not flattering. It is not surprising that his work was given the biblical title *By Their Deeds You Shall Know Them*. The recollections are presented thematically. They begin with "My Childhood," then deal with the period of adolescence, followed by a chapter called "The Journalistic Quarter," which places emphasis on the environment and the neighborhood, followed by further chapters on the Otets Paisii Bulgarian Youth Union. In several chapters Ivan recounts not only his experience as a student, but also university life and recalls professors in the Faculty of Classical Philology such as Alexander Balabanov, Dimitir Dechev, Veselin Beshevliev, and Vladimir Georgiev. Events are dealt with chronologically in chapters about the war, Venedikov's work in the Skopje Museum during the Second World War, postwar Sofia, followed by the chapters "Proto-Bulgarians and Slavs," "The Archaeological Museum," "The Two Directors," "The Thracians," and "The Three Competitions." In these chapters Venedikov recollects academic life, disputes, and personalities in the world of archeology in the late 1940s and 1950s, as well as problems he encountered as a scholar, derived from his career and achievements. The communist period forms a backdrop to his memories of excavations, strife in archeology, the antagonism between the Archaeological Institute and Museum, of its directors and scholarly disputes about Proto-Bulgarians and Slavs, and Thracians. He also includes stories about a particular scholar and his life, family, scholarly circle, political status, and academic disputes. The last chapter is devoted to the politician, diplomat, and memoirist Simeon Radev, in which Venedikov relates what he heard from Radev about his activity during the First World War.

Academic problems and contributions play a major role in Ivan Venedikov's memories. This is why he briefly outlines the sociopolitical background of events: "Life in the museum passed calmly, with the exception of troubles resulting from endless disputes. It was easy to work with Nikola Mavrodinov. Little by little he

became friends with the staff, and special habits gradually became established in the Museum.... Come on! This meant we were setting off for the Torino bar."¹⁵ He aimed to gain a voice in academic life by explaining his point of view about archeology in his memoirs. His recollections appear to be a good illustration of Mathew Hollaw's point on autobiographical performances.¹⁶

Petko's memories are more extensive and elaborate. They too adhere to the structure of autobiography as the most typical way of internalizing individual memory. Petko pays attention to his parents' families, to his childhood, studies, professorship at the Faculty of Law, his work at the bar association and as a translator, and problems encountered when publishing his works. His memoirs resemble a chronicle, where a reflection about the political situation in the world and in Bulgaria is followed by his individual memory. This approach is used to structure the memoir in chapters and gives form to the chapters themselves. Their titles do not correspond to periods in his life, but to major historical events. Thus the chapter called "My Recollections about My Early Childhood" is immediately followed by the chapter "1912 and 1913." Similarly, the chapter called "The First World War" is followed by "1917–1918," then "1919: Entering High School," "Al. Stamboliiski's Government." Like his brother, he included two thematic chapters in addition to the chronologically arranged ones. One, entitled "Poets and Books," brings together memories and events related to Ivan Vazov, Stoian Mikhailovski, Konstantin Velichkov, Petko Slaveikov, Pencho Slaveikov, and Peyo Yavorov, writers who died when he was very young. Another chapter is devoted to Simeon Radev and his creative activity, and his disagreements with Dr. Nikola Genadiev. In the chapters devoted to communism called "9 September 1944," "The Repressions," "1948," "In the Bar Association," and "The 1960s and 1970s," Petko Venedikov pays great attention to political events such as the Berlin Crisis of 1948, Tito's split with Moscow, the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the Prague Spring of 1968, and to famous political figures such as Georgi Dimitrov, Nikola Petkov, G. M. Dimitrov, Stalin's death, Vîlko Chervenkov, and Churchill. Ivan's memories of communism place emphasis on the state of science, his scholarly theses, and personal relations among his colleagues, while Petko's present a broader view of life under communism as a backdrop to his own life and public attitudes. Their memoirs therefore adopt dissimilar approaches. Their different professional lives largely explain this, since Petko left science and teaching, while Ivan pursued an academic career. They rarely participated in the same events, because each of them had his own life, and at one time Petko rented a house apart. Paradoxically, the strongest similarities are to be found in aspects about which

¹⁵ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 281.

¹⁶ Mathew Hollaw, "Introducing the Historian to History: Autobiographical Performances in Historical Texts," *Rethinking History* 13, no. 1 (2009), <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/content~db=all~content=a909481229>.

they keep silent. In their memoirs about communism neither Petko nor Ivan write about the everyday life of their closest relatives. Although the Venedikov and Genadiev families play a central role at the beginning of both books, after 9 September 1944 there is almost no mention of other members of the family or close relatives. This omission implicitly mirrors a policy put into practice by the communist regime not only to divide people into groups of "former" and "new," but also to make these divisions felt within families. When one member of a family was suspected of disloyalty toward the government, the whole family suffered, but the reliability of another member did not serve as a guarantee for the reliability of the rest of the family. As a result of the degradation of the old scientific elite, its members suppressed the memory of how their families had adapted, lived, and survived.

The two brothers remain silent about or suppress the same things. This even applies to their accounts of family life. One such story addresses the moment when the family was admitted to the district Fatherland Front (FF) mass organization. The details given by each brother differ substantially, regardless of the fact that both of them had participated in and witnessed the event, and that Petko could have checked Ivan's version. According to Ivan, they were one of the few families that had not joined the FF, and one of their neighbors, "a fanatical follower of Nikola Petkov," whose name was Evgeni Shaulov, took up the matter. At the meeting, "the widow of Georgi Bakalov," a "famous communist," said that she was going to vote against their membership because she did not know "whether my father had not taken part in the persecution of communists like many other officers." Together with one or two other women she voted against admitting them to the FF, but in the end they were admitted all the same. Then follows the reflection: "The whole time, as the members of my family took turns one after the other, I felt so humiliated that I just wanted to go home even though the Agrarian Party had still not entered into open opposition."¹⁷ The last sentence reveals that the event took place in 1945.

Petko's version is different. He claims that the event took place in 1948 when the chairman of the district FF organization, a friend from his university days, made it easier for them to become members, so they would benefit by joining this official organization. A woman opposed the application of their father, Iordan Venedikov, a former military man, historian, and member of the Military Historical Commission. "Lora Bakalova, daughter of the book publisher and communist Georgi Bakalov, who came from the Soviet Union, objected by saying that, 'The comrade, as I learn, works in the sphere of history, and Comrade Chervenkov says that there are many saboteurs in this sector.' Poor father had to try to explain that he was not a saboteur."¹⁸ In the end they were all accepted.

¹⁷ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 288.

¹⁸ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 474–75.

What the two memories have in common is the plot of the story and its happy ending, but also a missing detail, for both brothers identify the opponent incorrectly. Their memories of Lora's family relation with Bakalov diverge, they have different recollections of what she said, and Petko omitted to insert the title "Dr." in front of Lora Bakalova's name, although she was a well-known doctor. In short, the brothers' memories share in denying that dogmatic communists could also be representatives of the intellectual elite.

Another point they veil in silence is the family story about the escape of the third brother Dimităr to Macedonia. Like the previous story, their memories share a common plot, while rendering very different details. Ivan speaks at length about the submachine gun that Dimităr brought home while serving in the Bulgarian occupation corps in Serbia. He expressed fears that Dimităr may be accused of planning to overthrow the communist government, an accusation "which was quite reasonable. I could not get this thought out of my mind. It was clear to everybody that neither in Bulgaria nor anywhere else could this happen while the country was occupied by the Russians. I have no idea what he was thinking at that time, but it seemed to me that the best thing was to take the submachine gun out of the house." This is followed by yet another explanation: "Bulgaria was at war with the Germans and the proper place for all weapons was the battlefield." That is why Ivan got rid of the submachine gun at the earliest occasion. In the meantime his brother was arrested, though he managed to be released temporarily by taking poison and was sent back home, where Dr. Belovezhdova washed out his stomach. In order to save himself, his father arranged for him to join the Macedonian Volunteer Regiment, through his connections to Pavel Shatev, an old friend who was the head of this operation. Thus Dimităr left with other volunteers for Macedonia, where all trace of him was lost.¹⁹ On the same occasion Petko remembers that,

Mitio's return (from Serbia), which made us happy at first, soon plunged us into a state of anxiety, for they had come to arrest him. He also became frightened, for while he was a student he had gotten into trouble with the communists for political reasons.... At that time Asen Georgiev, uncle Mikhail's godson, was appointed as the chief secretary at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. My parents turned to him. After having carried out checks, he could not find out whether the government was after my brother for anything. After consulting with him, my parents decided to take him out of Sofia and send him to Macedonia. We learned that Pavel Shatev, on whom my parents had placed their hopes, had become minister of justice in the Socialist Republic of Macedonia.... Mitio managed to get out of Sofia.... He had a lot of troubles in Macedonia because he found complete anarchy there and no Shatev at all.... He [Mitio] managed to live under an assumed name until Tito's reconciliation with Khrushchev, at which time he came back.²⁰

¹⁹ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 259–60.

²⁰ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 416–17.

Even though they differ in detail, both memoirs make it clear that the escape to Macedonia was accomplished with the help of the family connection to Pavel Shatev, a prominent communist and left-wing leader of the Internal Macedonian Revolutionary Organization (IMRO). Dimitŕ enrolled as a volunteer in the Macedonian National Liberation Brigade, which is recorded in the State Security documents. However, both brothers fail to explain that this brigade had carried out denationalizing activities in the Pirin region, that is, that their brother became a communist collaborationist and apostate from their ideals.²¹ Both are proud of their Macedonian origins and of their anticommunism, which they state very explicitly in their memoirs, but both suppress the memory of the brigade in order to present themselves as patriots, true to their belief that Macedonia was an indelible part of Bulgaria.

The brothers' memory of their father's work in the Military History Commission is presented in similar fashion, stated as a matter of fact without elaborate explanation. Moreover, whereas Petko wrote that his father was working for the commission in 1948 and that the communist Shteryu Atanasov was satisfied with him, Ivan mentions only the fact that his father was a member of the commission.²² At another instance Ivan selectively refers to his father only as a tsarist general. Coupled with the biographies of his two other brothers as a dismissed professor and a nonreturnee, respectively, he explains that these were used as arguments by the director of the institute D. P. Dimitrov to thwart his bid to obtain the position of senior research associate in 1950.²³ Both brothers suppress the memory of their father's active engagement with public life under communism, so as not to undermine the impression of being persecuted by the communists.

Another topic addressed by both brothers is survival. Ivan recollects that he overcame difficulties under communism by working. He tried, for example, to publish something each year. Further salvation came from reading thrillers in the evenings, particularly those of Georges Simenon: "Thus I was thinking neither about new academic positions, nor about traveling abroad, nor about the troubles which success brought me."²⁴ Petko Venedikov points out that he had survived thanks to his young devoted wife and their walks in the open air: "There was no Stalin, Dimitrov, communism, or Fatherland Front there."²⁵ Both

²¹ This brigade was formed by former Bulgarian military men in Gorna Dzhumaia under pressure from the Communist Party of Yugoslavia and Skopje in September 1944, with the knowledge of the Bulgarian Workers Party (Communists), BRP (k) District Committee. This brigade launched a forceful denationalization campaign (i.e., forcing Bulgarians in the region to declare themselves Macedonian) in the Pirin region, until it was disbanded following a decree of the CC of the BRP (k).

²² Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 474; Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 280.

²³ *Ibid.*, 383.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 494.

brothers share memories about people from their circle of established scholars before the war who, regardless of their "transgressions" to communist practice, were either deliberately integrated by the new government, or had voluntarily adapted to its requirements. Petko Venedikov remembered Assoc. Prof. Lyuben Vassilev, Prof. Venelin Ganev, and Prof. Dimităr Orakhovats in this way, while Ivan Venedikov similarly remembered Prof. Alexander Burmov and Academician D. P. Dimitrov.

Petko describes the process of adaptation that was typical of well-known representatives of the old bourgeois intelligentsia. Communist power took root in society with the help of propaganda, by idolizing its own ideals and leaders, and by installing in its opponents a sense of guilt and fear. This also gave rise to sartorial mimicry:

We, the infidels, watched in bewilderment how this blind belief manifested itself and how everybody was expected to share it. Newspapers, magazines, radio, theater, poets and writers, everything was put to use in this direction.... Keeping away from these manifestations ... was enough to declare somebody a suspicious person, if not directly an enemy.... Under this pressure, life began to change. The appearance of people on the streets was changing.... People wearing clothes that were typical of the middle class were becoming sparse.... However, the reason for changing one's outer appearance was not so much the shortage; for many people, it was simply the result of mimicry, for they were afraid to appear dressed well, and they tried to adopt a somewhat proletarian appearance. The day of cloth caps, the proletarian hat, had come.²⁶

Ivan Venedikov recalls his enemy, Academician D. P. Dimitrov, wearing such a cap.²⁷ He reckoned that Dimitrov had adapted to the government and would constantly hinder his academic career by reducing him to the rank of a museum curator, by not allowing him to go abroad, and by thwarting his application for the position of a senior research associate, in order to promote his wife.²⁸ On the other hand, Maria Chichikova, Dimitrov's second wife, recalled that, despite the fact that he was allowed to join the Communist Party, Dimitrov was subject to constant checks, anonymous reports, and unmitigated suspicion. This is why he had to remain mindful of the political situation at all times, but he had never obstructed anyone's scholarly career because of her. She pointed

²⁶ Ibid., 430.

²⁷ D. P. Dimitrov is a well-known Bulgarian archeologist, assistant, and protégé of the Bulgarian archeologist and politician Bogdan Filov, who was condemned after 9 September 1944 and tried by the People's Court. In order to survive he had to publicly renounce his mentor and even become a member of the Bulgarian Communist Party. At the same time his scholarly career blossomed rapidly, and in 1947 he became a correspondent member of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences and the director of the Archeological Museum, and from 1963, of the Archaeological Institute. Dimitrov made a number of scholarly discoveries, the most important of which was the ancient town of Sevtopolis.

²⁸ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 286.

out that it was the long-term relations with Yugoslavia that prevented Venedikov from going abroad, due to the fact that his brother was a nonreturnee; this restriction was not a result of Dimitrov's machinations. Besides, Chichikova stressed that Ivan Venedikov's academic career blossomed in the early 1970s when, with the support of Prof. Alexander Fol, he got a job at the Institute of Thracology, a position that gave him the freedom to travel abroad. Unfortunately, as we saw above, the section of Venedikov's memoirs which might offer insight into what this distinguished scholar remembered and forgot in the most fruitful period of his life remains unpublished.

The published memoirs, like those of his brother, reveal how personal testimony about people and events contrasts with the official version of history under communism. However, in this case this is the testimony of contemporaries, not of participants. There are several common plots in the memoirs where their recollections give expression to such a contrast. One of them is the memory of 9 September 1944. Petko Venedikov argues that, early in September 1944 in Sofia there were no partisans at all, that "in the course of the events, nobody doubted that the overthrow of the Filov Regency and of Muraviev's government was a military coup. It was only later that historians claimed that 9 September 1944 was an armed uprising ... ordered by the Politburo of the Communist Party, which had no connection with truth. The overthrow of the government was a military affair."²⁹ Ivan wrote almost the same. On 9th of September he was not in Bulgaria but in Macedonia, where he worked as a curator at the Skopje Museum. He had accidentally heard that a military coup had taken place in Bulgaria. In a hotel in Gorna Dzhumaia [now Blagoevgrad] he learned that "the communists had seized power from the military and had started to arrest people.... Massacres had begun. Besides, there was no revolution whatsoever."³⁰

Another common plot, in which the individual memory of the two brothers diverges from the official memory under communism, concerns their views of the Soviet Union, Soviet troops, and Russians in general. The Soviet Union and the Russians are associated only with bad memories, with dictatorship and totalitarianism, while Soviet troops are characterized as "animals." This is also how Russians were once perceived by supporters of Adolf Hitler. "The Bolsheviks fight on a mass scale like semi-wild animals," is what Evdokia Filova wrote in her diary on 21 September 1941.³¹ Some bourgeois intellectuals in Bulgaria clearly had a fixed idea about the USSR, which was reflected in the memoirs of the two brothers. They blame Russians for introducing hard drinking to Bulgaria; the Russian soldiers had no watches, which is why jokes were

²⁹ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 392.

³⁰ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 248.

³¹ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 409; Filova, *Dnevnik*, 102.

told about how they stole from the civil population or how they tried to seduce women. Another representative of Sofia intellectuals, the daughter of Professor Dimităr Atanasov and painter Elena Atanasova, also writes about the drunken behavior of Soviet troops in Sofia.³² Anti-Sovietism and Russophobia became so fierce that Petko Venedikov admits that people close to him even wished for a third world war, so that the USA could defeat the USSR and set Bulgaria free of Soviet influence. He recollects with indignation that Soviet culture was imposed upon Bulgarian society. And when in 1950 he heard the lawyers' orchestra play a piece from *Carmen*, he remembers "how unexpected it was and how extraordinary it seemed to me."³³ Ivan Venedikov recollects with irony how Soviet-style archeology was adopted in Bulgaria, and how some overzealous communist colleagues like Zhivka Vizharova or Atanas Milchev promoted their academic careers by explaining that the Soviet Union was the Eldorado of archeologists and archeology, and how their attempts to introduce Soviet methods of excavation to Bulgaria appeared ridiculous because, for example, they claimed that sites in the USSR were dug with a spade rather than with a hoe.³⁴

Another plot shared by the two brothers, was their verdict on their communist colleagues. Ivan Venedikov remembers both as a contemporary and as a witness that "the communists were the most uneducated segment of the Bulgarian population, for they had no real social base. Bulgaria was not an industrial country and the working class was small."³⁵ His attitude to communist colleagues from before 9 September 1944 was also harsh. Of all the communists from the Association of Classicists, only Katia Peeva was interested "a little in science," and after the 9th of September, "among communists, there were, though few in number, some cultivated people"³⁶ in academic circles.

Petko Venedikov's recollections of his communist colleagues were formulated in less direct terms, for he was careful not to load his narrative with either positive or negative judgments, although he often assumed the role of a witness and participant. When he presented his work to the communist minister Dr. Mincho Neichev at the Civic Marriage Commission, the only comment he made was that he had not known him until then. His exchange with the communist Academician Todor Pavlov was much more ironic, as he defined his memoir as a "booklet.. He speaks impartially about his classmate communist friend Vladimir Topencharov, who had saved him from anguish at the time of the first purges that took place at the Faculty of Law. He mentions only Iaroslav Radev, a future academician who had considerable influence in juridical circles as one

³² Elena Atanasova, *Kogato veche ne milchim* (Sofia: Izdatelsko Atelie Ab, 2000), 123.

³³ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 463, 493.

³⁴ Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 339–42.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁶ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 179; Venedikov, *Poznaite gi po delata im*, 245.

of the participants in the purges.³⁷ At the same time, Petko Venedikov remembers Georgi Dimitrov with reference to the disparaging nicknames by which Dimitrov was known in Venedikov's circles, such as Gosho the Telegram, deriving from his forced postponement of the 1945 elections when he told Stalin about the elections in advance, but then had to excuse himself with a telegram.³⁸

The individual memory of the two brothers is sustained and provoked by books or current political conflicts, such as the discussions about the abolishment of the People's Court decisions in 1992. Their recollections are also refreshed by subsequent evidence relating to the events. At different moments in the text, Petko refers to the diary of Bogdan Filov, published in 1988, and to the memoirs of Winston Churchill, published in Bulgarian in the 1990s, as well as to other works that influenced the remembering of particular events or people. Even though the two brothers had not always been witnesses, and even less participants, their memoirs employ grammatically the past imperfect tense characteristic of witness testimonies.

In view of the fact that the brothers from the former elite were contemporaries, they nourished their memories by collecting rumors that circulated in their midst via banned foreign radio stations such as Radio Donau, the BBC, and via jokes. This list also marked the collective memory of the group of intellectuals with whom the Venedikovs were in touch during the communist period, and which collided with the official memory of the time. In order to show that they did not identify with the official memory, the brothers used constantly the impersonal "now it is known," "it is known," and, in the case of Ivan, "of course." Collective memories that reflected the political and cultural attitudes of their social milieu often prevailed over individual memory. At the same time, the two brothers clearly absorbed subconsciously some propaganda clichés of the former communist regime and reproduced them in their memories. They repeat terms from official propaganda on several occasions. For instance, Petko Venedikov never refers to partisans pejoratively as "shumkari" or "shumtsi" (people who took to the woods), as they were known to his social class³⁹ before 9 September 1944. Nor does he refer to them as "terrorists," as they were called after 10 November 1989. He writes about the 1923 "September Uprising," whereas his brother writes about the "September events." He recollects that he omitted from his memoirs "a girl who was justifiably celebrated by the communists as a hero after the 9th of September, that is, Liliana Dimitrova."⁴⁰

The Venedikov brothers wrote their memoirs about communism in the early 1990s, almost simultaneously, following the family tradition, and thereby con-

³⁷ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 496.

³⁸ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 447, 448.

³⁹ Filova, *Dnevnik*, 186.

⁴⁰ Venedikov, *Spomeni*, 352.

formed to the anticommunist wave of memoirs of the former intellectual elite that lived to see the collapse of communism. The two brothers' memoirs about life under communism could be defined as depictions of "survival" under communism and as acts of remembrance that entail a break with communism. In both cases, the process of remembering and forgetting the official memory under communism was profoundly integrated with the collective memory of people from their social and cultural milieu. Official memory inevitably leaves traces in individual memory. Even the effects of the new official memory of postcommunism is having a profound impact. By remembering and forgetting, the Venedikov brothers thereby identified themselves with their social circle of intellectuals in prewar Bulgaria, which had been repressed under communism, but which had retained their status as scholars and intellectuals who were an integral part of the new postcommunist society.

25. *Cum Ira et Studio:* Visualizing the Recent Past

Vania Stoyanova

The idea to deal with cinema in this particular project came from Maria Todorova. My initial choice leaned toward another topic where I felt more confident and experienced. The proposal sprang up in a conversation at our common friend's house and after thinking it through, I decided to take on the challenge (few Bulgarian historians are interested in this border field of investigation). In my first efforts one of Maria's articles helped me see in a different light the various types of sources on the past.¹

I admit I am a historian who loves cinema. As an academic researcher who works mostly with written sources and archival documents, I have always felt obliged to "observe the historical truth" while watching historical films (just like the films on socialism, my future object of study). This has affected to a certain extent my spontaneity to simply enjoy a work of art or to be moved by a well-told life story. In this case, besides being an avid film viewer, next to my literary and archival familiarity with history, and next to the abundant memories of the recent past printed and broadcast by mass media, there came my personal perceptions and memories—I had lived in socialism, after all. What a challenge to my scholarly integrity and expertise!

In order to overcome this challenge, I have tried as much as possible to look at the bigger picture and analyze processes and tendencies by reading them alongside the social, political, and cultural environment they appear in. In my research for this chapter I thus followed two broad themes. On the one hand, bearing in mind that the films created during the transition are the result of subjective artistic ideas, ambitions, and experience, I wanted to explore the (collective) image of socialism interpreted by means of cinema and offered to the public. At the same time, I tried to do so, as far as possible, in comparison to the image of the same epoch presented by historiography or mass media. On

¹ Maria Todorova, "Islamizatsiata kato motiv v bilgarskata istoriografiia, literatura i kino," *Studia Balcanica* 23 (2001): 369–91.

the other hand, analyzing the changing perceptions, visual interpretations, and memory of the recent past over time, I tried to outline the shifting image of my own dynamic time as it will be remembered or rediscovered by future generations.

The definition of memory as the "present of the past" offered by Marie-Claire Lavabre focuses on the fact that "memory is a phenomenon of the present and underlines the difference between history and memory, i.e., the difference between the past as it 'really happened' and what memory does out of it." Such distinction does not suggest that history is "true" and memory is "untrue," it only emphasizes that "the former is guided by an interest stemming from knowledge while the latter is motivated by the political will or the concern for identity and refers to the example, to the 'lessons of history' or to the topic of origins."²

From this point of view cinema is connected to both history and memory. As a work of art a film in the genre of "historical cinema" offers a subjective approach to the past. Even though a historical drama delivers a moral message and is linked with present-day public debates and markers of identity, it also—just like the professional historian—aspires to present "as far as it is possible certain elements of the past reality or make the latter understandable."³

What historians and history filmmakers share in common is the kind of questions they ask of the past—"not just what happened or why it happened, but what is the meaning of what happened to us today." What cinema does is to answer these questions "within the possibilities of the dramatic genre and the visual media."⁴

This is the starting point for the overview of Bulgarian films which over the past two decades have been trying to visualize, contest, and rethink the recent past: the socialist era in Bulgaria.

Feature Films

Immediately after the end of state socialism and in the context of deep political, economic, social, and value transformations, Bulgarian filmmakers, too, naturally faced the question of "who are we today and why."⁵ They continue to pose

² Marie-Claire Lavabre, "Istoriia i pamet: niakoi otpravni tochki," *Sotsiologicheski problemi* 3–4 (1998): 8–9.

³ *Ibid.*, 9.

⁴ Robert A. Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History* (Harlow: Pearson Education Limited, 2006), 117–18.

⁵ The problem of representation of socialism in Bulgarian cinema is not new for Bulgarian film history and criticism. Among the publications in the specialized and mass editions I would point

this question with varying intensity after twenty years in search of catharsis through knowledge about themselves and society.

The first half of the 1990s witnessed a prolific production of movies dealing with the socialist past: *Kmete, Kmete* (Mayor, mayor; 1990), *Lagerît* (The camp; 1990), *Seltseto* (The village; 1990), *Ti, koito si na nebeto* (You, who are in heaven; 1990), *Iskam Amerika* (I want America; 1991), *O, Gospodi, kîde si?* (Oh, God, where are you?; 1991), *Kladenetsît* (The well; 1991), *Tishina* (Silence; 1991), *Vampiri, talasîmi* (Vampires, goblins; 1991), *Milchanieto* (The Waste, 1991, dir. Krasimir Kroumov), *Krîgovrat* (Rotation; 1993), *Sezonît na kanarchetata* (The canary season; 1993), *Sirna nedelia. Den za proshka* (Forgiveness day; 1993), *Gori, gori, ogînche* (Burn, burn, little flame; 1994, a TV film), *Granitsa* (Border; 1994). Some of them had an uneasy fate. Conceived during socialism (as their authors testify), during perestroika, or even earlier, they did not materialize due to ideological or organizational reasons.⁶ As soon as political censorship was abolished, these films revealed to the audience pages from the near past which until then the wide public had not seen on screen or had known only in the version heroicized by communist ideology.⁷

Some of the main tropes through which socialism was represented in Bulgarian feature films during the first five years of the transition were: the establishment of the communist government after 9 September 1944 and the persecution

out the works of Dina Iordanova, *New Bulgarian Cinema* (Fife, Scotland: College Gate Press, 2008); idem, "Canaries and Birds of Prey: The New Season of Bulgarian Cinema," <http://www.utexas.edu/ftp/pub/eems/Bulgarian.html>; Ron Holloway and idem, "Hoping for a Bulgarian Film Revival," <http://www.kinokultura.com/specials/5/holloway-iordanova.shtml>; Boz-hidar Manov, "Bulgarian Cinema Today: Seventeen Years after the Changes," <http://www.kino.kultura.com/specials/5/manov.shtml>; Roumiana Delcheva, "Reliving the Past in Recent East European Cinemas," in *East European Cinemas*, ed. Anikó Imre (New York/London: Routledge, 2005), 197–211; idem, "Eastern Europe as a Politically Correct Scapegoat: The Case of Bulgaria," *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture: A WWWeb Journal* 1, no. 2 (1999), <http://clwebjournal.lib.purdue.edu/clweb99-2/delcheva999-1.html>.

⁶ Radoslav Spasov's *Day of Forgiveness* (1993) is based on a script written in 1988–1989 (*Kino* 2 [1992]: 44). Dimitîr Petkov wrote the script of his film *Silence* in 1987–1988 and shot it in 1989 (interview in *BNT Presents*, 30 June 2008). The script of *Border* was also written before 1989 (*BNT Presents*, 21 July 2008). As for *The Canary Season*, the first version of the script, named *Blue Canaries* and based on the novel by N. Vilchinov, had been submitted for approval in the early 1980s. It was subsequently rewritten seventeen times over thirteen years. It was finally given the green light after 1989 (interview with E. Mihailov, *BNT Presents*, 30 June 2008).

⁷ For example, the most famous Bulgarian TV series of the 1970s, *Na vseki kilometîr* (On each kilometer), dealt with the clandestine communist struggle before and during the Second World War during its first season, while its second season was dedicated to "The Fighters of the Silent Front," i.e., the State Security Services depicted in heroic and romantic manner. In the episodes covering the first years after 9 September 1944 they are at war with foreign and domestic foes consisting of unreliable elements interned deep in the countryside, spies disguised as members of religious societies, underground squads operating on the borders, that is, all the political enemies of the new regime.

of real and alleged political adversaries; the detention camps and the internment in the countryside of potentially dangerous people; the State Security with the two sides of the system—the officers and the recruited agents; the forcible nationalization of property, collectivization of land, and the changes in the Bulgarian village; the perversions in the army; the relationship between state power and artists, and the crushing of the free creative spirit. Some of them had been already touched upon in previous productions. As early as 1966 Vladislav Ikonov's film *Prizovaniiat ne se iavi* (The subpoenaed didn't show up) hinted at the purges within the Communist Party and the restoration of the atmosphere of trust (the protagonist was sued for treachery and was subsequently vindicated). Ivan Nichev's *1952: Ivan and Alexandra* (1988), created during perestroika and honored at the Golden Rose Bulgarian Film Festival, gave muted voice to the problem of communist repressions. But it was only after the political changes and the wide publicity that the crimes of the regime received from the political tribune, mass media, historiography, and most of all, the dramatic memoirs of the camp and prison survivors, that the repressions could appear on screen—in features, as well as documentaries. The thorny wire fence with the observation posts in the corners became their most sinister visual symbol—it can be seen in almost every film on the 1940s and 1950s, together with the brutal scenes of violence, exerted on women above all (*The Well*, *The Waste*, *The Canary Season*). The detention camp fence and the painful experience on both sides (i.e., prisoners and relatives) remained in the focus of filmmakers in the following years: *Sled kraia na sveta* (After the end of the world; 1998, dir. Ivan Nichev), *Podgriavane na vcherashniia obed* (The heating of yesterday's lunch; 2002, dir. Kostadin Bonev), *Izpepeliavane* (Burning; 2004, dir. Stanimir Trifonov). The same symbols plus Bulgaria's map decorated with skulls were utilized by the Union of Democratic Forces in their propaganda campaign for the first democratic elections in 1990. It produced a rather negative effect, as did the poetics of brutal naturalism and violence dominating the first films of the transition.

There is regularity as far as the time period is concerned: most of the plots are situated in the late 1940s and early 1950s, i.e., during Stalinism (exceptions to this rule are *Granitsa* and *Gori, gori, ogînche*, taking place in the 1970s). The films did not demonstrate a rich variety of genres: the directors preferred to build their film story as a drama or melodrama and only *Vampiri, talasîmi* contains elements of parody and the grotesque.

To the background of the significant film production of socialist cinematography with its best artistic achievements, and after the removal of political restrictions, it was natural to expect that the new Bulgarian cinema looking back to the bygone years, would not only morally reassess the near past, but would enter into a dialogue with it in an attempt to rethink it and move forward. Instead, the early films of the transition period repeated the well-known "politically correct" clichés reminiscent of the aesthetics of the *proletkult* from the

first years of socialism “while constructing a new grand narrative, equally epic and autocratic, writing itself onto an illusory tabula rasa.”⁸ Somewhat out of this pattern are the films *Granitsa* (1993), a film debut of three young authors credited by both critics and audience for its serious dramaturgic basis, as well as the excellent elegiac drama *Ti, koito si na nebeto* (1990)—a screen version of the homonymous novel by Victor Paskov.

In the early postcommunist narrative the visual image of violence as the main characteristic of the communist era came to the fore. This was not by accident. In the transition to state socialism violence was officially propagandized and desired.⁹ In postsocialist cinema, the victims of this violence were depicted as mostly innocent ordinary people with many faces: the young woman from a seaside city, raped by the son of a local party functionary (*Sezonit na kan-archetata*); the teacher and wife of an officer from the royal army (*Kladenetsit*); the creative artist—the main actress in *Vampiri, talasimi* who survived through compromises with herself and her friends, or the nonconformist sculptor from *Tishina* whose works were melted in the blast furnace and only the statues of the bound liberty and the huge marble step (a metaphor for socialist censorship) were saved from the flames; the soldier who lost his moral fiber and turned into a murderer to indulge the inhuman requirements of the system, etc., etc. Violence could be political and economic, but also ethnic as in the *Gori, gori, oginche* (dir. Rumiana Petkova)—a TV miniseries on the problems of the ethnic Bulgarian Muslims (Pomaks) in the Rhodopes Mountains in the 1970s, and the religious intolerance and human rights abuses during the communist regime. The painful problems of Bulgarian society concerning mutual tolerance and coexistence of ethnic and religious communities and the political experiments of the ruling elites continued in the film productions of the following years. In *Sled kraia na sveta* (1998) the director Ivan Nichev and the script writer Anzhel Vagenshtain examined the ethnically and religiously variegated oasis of the old Plovdiv in the 1940s. Six years later, in 2004, the same message of religious and ethnic tolerance appeared in Radoslav Spasov’s *Otkradnati ochi* (Stolen eyes)—a film depicting the drama of the Turks in Bulgaria during the forced name-changing campaign euphemistically called the “revival process.” The plot is based on a true story though it sounds as an allegorical tale about the wounds that need to be healed in order for society to restore its broken entity.

In a broader Balkan context the theme of national conflicts was developed in the Bulgarian–Macedonian co-production *Podgriavane na vcherashniia obed*. Spanning several historical periods—Yugoslavia of the 1930s, Bulgaria-annexed Vardar Macedonia during the Second World War, the postwar Socialist

⁸ Delcheva, “Reliving the Past,” 198.

⁹ Iskra Baeva, “Smiana na elita i kadrite v Bŭlgariia i Iztochna Evropa, 1944–1948,” *Litsa na vremeto* 1 (1996): 65–90.

Republic of Macedonia, and the breakup of Yugoslavia in the 1990s—the film traced seventy years of the bitter history of Macedonia embodied in the fate of a woman whose whole life was a struggle to survive and keep her dignity. Beyond the moral message the film also suggested that ethnic conflicts and social and political exercises in nation-building in the Balkans were older and longer than the era of socialism, though equally merciless to the individual.

The early Bulgarian postcommunist cinema had as its main focus the repressive apparatus of the system: numerous shattered lives of people of high morality, who preserved their human virtues or, on the contrary, morally deformed individuals, taken by cynicism and indifference, conformists with confused ideas of good and evil, oscillating between illusions, self-delusions, and treacheries. However, these movies failed to ask the questions of what stood behind this violence, what were its roots and motivation, how and why it was born, or what were its mechanisms. Directors rarely looked behind the facts in an effort to understand their characters' psychology. As Ivailo Znepolski notices, the multiple demonstrations of brutality in the years of revolutionary terror and Stalinist dictatorship were as if "implicitly attributed to the ideology and pathology of the communism."¹⁰ However, he further argues that "between the notions of revolutionary violence and totalitarian arbitrariness a borderline zone of cultural conditions appears, which refers us to the traditional rural society of clan relations and low political culture."¹¹

What the first films on the harshest years of state socialism neglected was to a greater extent touched upon in the TV series *Khaika za vîltsi* (Battue for wolves; 2000, dir. Stanimir Trifonov), telling the story of the postwar tragedy of the Bulgarian village in the years of collectivization. The success of the film would be impossible without the brilliant novel of the same name by Ivailo Petrov, published in 1986. By examining peasant life in a wider timespan with all its deep cultural layers, the novel circumvents the trap of a single linear film story with ideologically biased interpretations.

However, a comparison between the novel and the TV series reveals differences which concern not only the genre and the structure of the TV rendition, but its ideological bent as well. The filmmakers rewrote the novel amplifying its anti-communist character. Oppositional as it was in the 1980s, in the 1990s it seemed insufficiently critical to the filmmakers, in the context of the radical anticommunist ideas in the Bulgarian public sphere after 1989. In an attempt to compensate for it, they made changes which substantially altered the novel's plot and meaning.¹²

¹⁰ Ivailo Znepolski, *Bilgarskiiat komunizîm: Sotsiokulturni cherti i vlastova traektorii* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na blizkoto minalo/Institut "Otvoreno obshtestvo," 2008), 104.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Blagovest Zlatanov, "'Khaika za vîltsi': Kak filmît prenapisva romana," *Liternet*, <http://liternet.bg/publish3/bzlatanov/haika.htm>.

After the mid-1990s, and in particular in the years following the political crisis of the winter of 1996–1997 which brought into power the government of the Union of Democratic Forces for the second time, it became clear that the transformation of the political system was definitive and irrevocable. The most acute political battles faded away, and a generational change in the elites on both the left and the right took place. In public rhetoric the opposition of “communism–anticommunism” continued but its peak had already subsided. On the other hand, in Bulgaria, similar to the other East European countries, a wave of nostalgia for socialism pervaded large strata of society, nourished by the high social price of the transition and its unexpectedly long duration.

One would assume that once the political situation calmed down and it became apparent that the changes were irreversible, a public atmosphere would emerge conducive to a deeper rethinking of the past, rather than oblivion. In reality, however, for a while Bulgarian cinema showed a decreasing interest in the socialist era.¹³ Insofar as socialism appeared on the screen, it was explicitly or implicitly depicted in temporal opposition to present-day postcommunism with its deformations: mafiotic privatization and morality, widespread material and spiritual poverty, the marginalization of large strata of society, and clashing value systems between generations. Without glorifying the previous social and political system, they posed on an existential basis the question of the moral coordinates of the individual looking for the “truth of life” in the changing world and in the clash between generations. Such attitudes can be noticed in Edward Zakhariiev’s film *Zakásnialo pílnolunie* (Belated full moon; 1996), in the already mentioned *Sled kraia na sveta*, and in Andrei Slabakov’s *Wagner* (1998). But despite the nostalgic tendencies among sections of Bulgarian society, the cinematic reply to them was not so straightforward. Bulgarian filmmakers as a whole remained immune to nostalgia for the recent past which distinguishes films like the Czech *Kolya* and the German *Good Bye, Lenin!* Fine irony and vivid humor were not the language in which Bulgarian feature film directors said their “long goodbye” to socialism.

One of the few films from the first decade of the transition looking at the past with a lyric sense of humor is *Sled kraia na sveta*, set in the multiethnic and multireligious postwar Plovdiv. In it an old Greek photographer with a resigned smile remembers the grand but utopian aims declared by the builders of socialism. Fifty years ago they deprived him of his studio: “They would build a palace of socialism, they said. They built neither a palace, nor socialism.” The sweet nostalgic mood of the film spanning two epochs—the mid-1940s and the 1990s—refers to the traditions of idyllic coexistence of Bulgarians, Armenians, Turks, Roma, and Jews of the pre-Second World War years, shaken by the poli-

¹³ This might be also due to the peculiarities of the film production processes requiring significant financial and organizational efforts.

tics of the new men in power in the name of the "bright future of socialism" during the second half of the 1940s. The return to the touching, well-constructed and executed story with a message for tolerance and mutual understanding is another characteristic that distinguishes this film from the rest of Bulgarian productions of the early 1990s.

Somewhat reminiscent of the bizarre world of Kusturica's characters (without their vigor and moralizing spirit) is the film *Wagner* (1998) of the young director Andrey Slabakov. His eccentric, original, and even mannerist work is interesting for the interweaving of past and present in a real and imaginary environment. The surrealistic action seemingly set up outside concrete temporal frames but in the well-known setting of poverty and dusk, mixes communist symbols and clichés with grotesque figures and plots from postsocialist life. Past and present merge in an absurd plot and vision as if to suggest the idea of the unreal, abnormal, and fabricated world that we lived and still live in.

In the context of the postsocialist perspective on the near past that sought to redefine moral values and existential meanings, the film *Izpepeliavane* (2004) seemed somewhat unusual. It was shot in the genre and poetics of the early 1990s productions and tells the sad love story of a young Bulgarian-Italian couple in the late 1940s and early 1950s. The plot, the concept and the vision of the film were reminiscent of *Sezonit na kanarchetata*. Some scenes demonstrate efforts to break open the one-sided presentation of "historical truth," for instance the dialogue on historical guilt and revenge between the politically "neutral" in Bulgarian matters Italian doctor ("You persecuted and killed them [the communists] before, now they are paying you back") and the general from the royal army who claims to have served his fatherland according to his understanding of loyalty and duty.

The final inscriptions announce his name—General Vilkov, a notorious figure condemned by the Left for the repressions against leftist political figures in Bulgaria in 1923–1925. He is, perhaps, the only real historical figure represented in Bulgarian post-1989 films on socialism. Reviewed here as "historical cinema," the films on postwar Bulgaria are in fact more in the genre of popular drama where history is personalized in the stories of fictional characters of small, ordinary people intertwined in social and political processes by the will of politicians and "big" history makers.

Even though they depict fictional characters and construct fictional plots, the film authors are not insured against accusations of distorting the historical truth. Criticism is typically directed against the interpretation of the theme as a whole (and not so much against the veracity of specific details), with the most frequent accusation being the deliberate distortion of the "spirit of the time." The authors, on the contrary, counterattack with the power of verifiable documentary evidence, autobiographies and memories, which they retell in the language of art—through condensation, symbol, and metaphor. The public response to the

film *Granitsa* illustrates how the personal feelings of authors and audience determine the reception of a film. After it became a box office hit on the Bulgarian market with 100,000 viewers, the general staff of the army and officers from the reserve challenged its credibility. The authors were accused of nihilism, treason, and insulting the honor of the army. Voices in favor of its cancellation were also heard but such a step was never taken. The main criticism from the military referred to the “profanation of the truth about the rules and habits in the army”—a Bulgarian soldier has never killed runaways, such perversions concerning human dignity have never been typical of the army life. The naturalistic and repulsive scenes of sex and hard drinking were also indignantly denied.¹⁴ The first arguments with which the authors defended their work was not their right to free personal interpretation of the facts, but documentary verification—i.e., they chose the categories of history over those of aesthetics. They argue that the script was written after a thorough study of the Ministry of the Interior archives comprising shocking data on the victims (both Bulgarian and foreign) who tried to illegally cross the Bulgarian border in the years of socialism. Emil Tonev, one of the script cowriters, testified that everything shown in the film had happened, though not in one and the same place, “Still, this is a feature.” The coscriptwriter, Khristian Nochev asserted: “The truth is 100%. We’ve met and talked to hundreds of people, members of the cast included, who have done their service at the border.” Though, by “truth” one is to understand not the “letter” but the “spirit” of time.¹⁵ The different ideas of what “truth” means and how it can be rendered stem both from the peculiarities of the genre, and the audience’s tendency to accept it based on personal experience, memories, erudition, and—in time of political confrontation—the (in)compatibility of their own views with the offered interpretation.¹⁶

In the first decade of the new millennium most Bulgarian films no longer focused exclusively on the shocking events of the socialist past (the film *Otkradnati ochi* is an exception). Still, the past inevitably informs the present and this is a major theme in *Drugiat nash vîzmozhen zhivot* (The other possible life of ours; 2004, dir. Rumiana Petkova), a movie telling the story of an emigrant returning from America for his father’s funeral and a woman with a university degree currently forced to work as a tram driver. Their love story begins in the 1980s, breaks down with his decision to run away “behind the iron curtain,” and is revived twenty years later with the question of what life could have been had they made different choices.

¹⁴ *BNT Presents*, 21 July 2008.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Sezonît na kanarchetata* provided the occasion for similar debate among the professional film critics. See Alexandar Donev, “Sezonît, koito vse oshte prodîlzhava,” *Kino* 1 (1994): 8; Iako Molkhov, “Sezonît na kanarchetata,” *Kino* 6 (1993): 22.

In addition, two of the three stories in *Maimuni prez zimata* (Monkeys in winter; 2006, dir. Milena Andonova) are set in the 1960s (of the Romani woman Dona) and in the 1980s (of the ambitious law student Lucrecia). The return to the past figures also in *Pazachît na mîrtvite* (The guard of the dead; 2006, dir. Ilian Simeonev) with the funeral of the diseased who framed an old man in order to take his wife in the 1950s. Similarly, *Buntît na L.* (The rebellion of L.; 2006, dir. Kiran Kolarov) starts in the 1980s with the failed attempt of a high school student Loris to flee to the West, continues with his subsequent life in prison following his discovery by the authorities, and finally traces his life and death in the postcommunist era. However the function of the past in this film is different, as is the protagonist's motivation to look back: "Its positioning toward 'now' and 'today' is freed from the fatalism typical of the mentality of people (community?) who identify themselves as victims."¹⁷ In fact, the problem of personal choice was posed in *Granitsa*, as well, but then the possible options were either moral corruption or escape abroad. "Social" and "individual" are intertwined and the characters make their choices influenced by both social circumstances and private emotions, taking the responsibility to live with the consequences.

The image of the woman is also different from the earlier postcommunist films. From a raped victim in a male-dominated world she turns into an independent individual who bears the consequences of her own choice. The tram driver, university graduate, and poetess carries the cross of a working single mother by her own decision (*Drugiiat nash vîzmozhen zhivot*). All three women in *Maimuni prez zimata* situated in the three time periods (the 1960s, the 1980s, and today) are not simply manipulated by circumstances; they all have their options and make their hard choices—in different times with different limitations (both private and social) and pay the due price for it.

Moreover, a new mood enters Bulgarian films—after the fatalistic gloomy and depressing pictures that dominated the screen the previous decade, a new flow of life-asserting optimistic belief that life is worth living and there is hope ahead, penetrates new feature films. This also applies to the attitude toward the past, as illustrated in Stefan Komandarev's last film *Svetît e goliam i spasenie debne otvsiakide* (The world is big and salvation lurks everywhere; 2007), based on the autobiographical novel by the Bulgarian-born German writer Ilija Trojanow. (The film is a coproduction of Bulgaria, Germany, Slovenia, and Hungary.) The action starts in 1976 when Alex was born in a small Bulgarian town. Several years later the family decides to emigrate to the West. Following a stay in a refugee camp and the subsequent breakup of the family, thirty years later Alex's grandfather Bay Dan (the local master of backgammon) meets his

¹⁷ Antonia Kovacheva, "Bîlgarskite filmi na Sofia Film Fest '07. Lazare, stani!," *Kultura*, 11 April 2007, 14.

grandson in a hospital in Germany, where Alex is recovering from an accident in which he has lost his parents. Bay Dan teaches Alex how to play the ancient game and gradually brings him back to life and to his past. Eventually, the two of them set on a trip to Bulgaria full of humor and memories. The road brings them back to Alex's birthplace where he would find the truth about his past and present. This new step to catharsis is perhaps a belated Bulgarian look to the past in the nostalgic trend of the East European cinemas ("belated" in terms of release as the movie was conceived eight years earlier). But there is more to the movie than this. In terms of setting scores with the past, Bulgarian cinema started with the total and angry denial and martyrdom (*Sezonît na kan-archetata*), passed through internal devastation and suicide as an outcome (*Iz-pepeliavane*) to the rediscovery of vitality and rebirth (*Svetît e goliam i spasenie debne otvsiafade*). Moreover, self-identification and validating of one's own life does not necessarily come through Western values.

In contrast to the dominant tropes of the escape across the border as a possible solution—whether a successful (*Granitsa*) or unsuccessful one (*Buntît na L.*); the distorted life in suffering (*Milchanieto*, *Kladenetsît*, *Sezonît na kan-archetata*); or the suicide (*Izpepeliavane*), Stefan Komandarev's film asserts the idea of return: via time and space, from death to life, from West to East, to one's own roots and self-discovery.

The message that a film sends is not permanent or inflexible and depends on one's position in the chronotope.¹⁸ Created while radical changes were in progress—in politics, in economics, and in mentalities—these films were also a product of the transition. Today, twenty years after the changes began and after a dozen films were produced, some filmmakers would like for the audience to accept them as a mere battle of aesthetic categories or simply as dramatic life stories. Kiril Marichkov pleaded for just this before the premiere of *Vampiri, talasîmi* was due on national television on 7 July 2008, noting that the revolutionary determination has subsided under the influence of the new realities and the personal realization that there is no absolute freedom. Since compromises are inevitable in the struggle for survival, to him the important question is how far one may go and what borders should never have been stepped over.¹⁹ Nikolay Urumov, an actor in the same film, similarly shared that he would like it to be assessed not as a story with a political or ideological message (which would hardly have any relevance today after the political euphoria has passed away) but as a conflict of human characters, the competition between the competent and incompetent, and in general, the clash between aesthetic values. Actress

¹⁸ Maria Todorova, "Conversion to Islam as a Trope in Bulgarian Historiography, Fiction and Film," <http://www.eurozine.com/articles/2003-11-04-todorova-en.html/>.

¹⁹ *BNT Presents*, 7 July 2008. Kiril Marichkov is the composer of the movie's soundtrack and a former MP from the UDF.

Paraskeva Dzhukelova, expressed a similar hope in reference to *Sezonî na kan-archeteta*: that it would not be seen as a political film, but as an interesting and complex story of the obstacles which an ordinary woman overcomes and survives.²⁰

In conclusion, in the course of two decades Bulgarian feature films on socialism constructed a shifting image of the epoch developing from "a portrait of an epoch" to "a portrait of ourselves"; from the moral condemnation of an era to a deeper insight into the role of social circumstances and personal choices in determining the individual's acts; from a focus on Stalinism to representations of the "developed socialist society." Filmmakers were not the first to formulate the new topics in public discussion on the near past—historians, publicists and memoirists have been filling in the gaps in the history of Bulgarian socialism since at least perestroika. Nevertheless, feature films do it with greater emotional power and with larger impact since they reach bigger audiences. By blending sentiment and memory, history and politics, Bulgarian post-1989 films both illustrate and participate in the process of identity formation through reliving the past.

Documentaries

The documentary is often mistakenly opposed to the feature film because of its presumed direct relationship to reality. However, a documentary, too, can be "positioned, ideological and partisan."²¹ As Robert Rosenstone has pointed out, even if it is wholly made from actuality footage, "it is never a neutral 'history lesson', but a cunning work that must be as carefully interpreted by the viewer as the dramatic film."²²

However scrupulous to the facts of history and objective in their analysis, documentarians have the definite aim to tell "their" story about a specific aspect of the past. As the documentary director Alan Rosenthal says:

I want to tell a good story that will engage both the head and the intelligence, and the heart and the emotions. I want to put the viewers in touch with the past in a way that academics can't do. I want to help them keep memories alive. And I want to recall a forgotten history that seems to me important... I can't give them reality, but I can give them a credible representation of reality and tell them certain things about it which may affect who they are and how they view the world.²³

At the beginning of the twenty-first century Bulgarian documentary cinema is quite varied in topics and approaches. Still there is one visible tendency—this

²⁰ *BNT Presents*, 14 July 2008.

²¹ Rosenstone, *History on Film/Film on History*, 72.

²² *Ibid.*, 87–88.

²³ Cited in *ibid.*

is no longer the direct, socially engaged and biased cinema of the early years of the transition when, as a Bulgarian film critic writes, “the nation shared the illusion that it was participating in the making of history.”²⁴ Similar to the processes in historiography where the increasingly popular microhistory examines “macro processes as resulting from multiple individual choices,”²⁵ Bulgarian documentaries today deal both with the big problems of the national community and with the experiences of the individual, but the authors’ viewpoint has definitely shifted to the personality of the particular individual.

The tendency of “normalizing” the perception of the recent past, noticeable in feature films, is quite visible in documentary cinema, as well. To illustrate this I focus on three documentaries created in the years 2007–2009 that deal with the past of socialist Bulgaria. The first, titled *Poslednata svoboda* (The last freedom; 2008, dir. Rosen Elezov) features four former political prisoners who tell their life-shattering experiences in the 1950s–1970s.

In the second one, *Koi e tozi Kosta Tsonev?* (Who is this Kosta Tsonev?; 2009, dir. Dimităr Sharkov), one of the great Bulgarian actors tells his life story with the satisfaction of a man living an accomplished life.

In the third film, *Po osobeno zhestok nachin* (In an especially cruel manner; 2007, dir. Rosen Elezov), one of the most renowned Bulgarian cinematographers and writers Svoboda Bichvarova makes a dramatic confession in a dialogue with herself—and indirectly with her father—about truth and morality, with repentance and religious humility.

What these three documentaries share in common is that all took the form of confession—something typical for current Bulgarian documentary cinema. The characters speak in front of the camera about their past in an attempt to draw a balance sheet of their life path.

Elezov’s *Poslednata svoboda* refers to one of the big topics of Bulgarian society and cinema—the political repressions of socialism. The film appeared in 2008 in the heat of the resumed public debate on the former State Security files and the publication in mass media of the lists of its exagents who are still on state or public service. Although history and public memory have preserved the names of the most prominent opponents of the regime, the great majority of the political victims are still unknown to the wide public. This is what *Poslednata svoboda* is trying to rectify.²⁶

²⁴ Dimităr Kabaivanov, “Sivremennoto bilgarsko dokumentalno kino—ogledalo ili ideia za deistvitelnostta,” *Kino* 5 (2005): 26.

²⁵ Liliana Deyanova, *Ochertaniia na milchanieto* (Sofia: KX Press, 2009), 212.

²⁶ “*Poslednata svoboda* is an attempt to resurrect in the memory of Bulgarians some forgotten images which people do not know at all,” says Tosho Peikov, one of the scriptwriters and producer of the film in an interview with the Focus Agency, http://kino.gbg.bg/index.php?p=news&newsid=10830&Prog_city=8.

As already mentioned in regard to feature films, the theme of the political repressions understandably attracted the attention of Bulgarian filmmakers most actively in the early years of the transitions. The documentarians, too, responded to the necessity of "filling in the blank spots." In the words of Ivo Draganov, after the political changes when "some felt confused, others were hesitating, still others had lost faith, Atanas Kiriakov 'took the bull by the horns.'"²⁷ He shot the two-series documentary *Otselelite: Lagerni razkazi* (The survivors: Detention camp stories) in which former friends at forced labor camps tell their stories. The people who had survived the horrors of the repressions shared their bitter experiences with the desire to make these dark years known to the public.

After this first documentary was made in 1990 (and since then never broadcast again on TV), it was the feature cinema that exploited the dramatic energy of this subject, while documentarians were less active. The documentary approach to the theme was revived with Rosen Elezov's *Chernata tetradka* (The black notebook; 1995)—a film about the victims of socialism whose names miraculously have survived in a notebook of a lieutenant from the State Security Services. In 1999 came *Prisidata—Obvinenieto* (The sentence—The accusation; dir. Anna Petkova)—again a film about the detention camps. This time in the focus of the camera are the militia, State Security officers, and Communist Party functionaries in charge of the detention camps and the torturing of prisoners, trying to explain their decisions and justify themselves. The film also presents startling documentary evidence on the organization and functioning of the camps, and the relations among the different levels of power.

Like *Otselelite*, Elezov's film, too, relies on the autobiographical story and focuses on the individuals and their fates in the repressive system. It is shot in an entirely contemporary setting and does not use archival footage or a voice-over narration. The former political prisoners visit the places of their trials and recollect what they have once experienced there. The film does not dwell on the machine of political pressure as a whole—ideology, organization, political practice. Nor does it detail the participants' own political activity. The authors focus on the acts of repression, torture, derision, crushing the individual and his life—i.e., it is centered on the personality, on suffering and survival with dignity. The moral lesson of the film is to resist the temptation of becoming a traitor and informer of the State Security Services. "I kept myself clear" is heard from the screen against the lists of names of prospering former informers that the commission for the files continues to make public.

The second documentary *Koi e tozi Kosta Tsonev* is dedicated to the eightieth birthday of one of the finest Bulgarian actors, and is based on his autobiography *Don Kikhot ot Krasno Selo* (Don Quixote from Krasno Selo), published

²⁷ Ivo Draganov, "Atanas Kiriakov na 70. Da khvanesh bika za rogata ...," *Kultura*, 25 March 2009.

in 2001. It falls in the tradition of recent Bulgarian documentaries which draw portraits of intellectuals, artists, sportsmen, and even of ordinary people, in which private and social space are mixed and where personal stories build up the multicolored picture of the historical time. The film adheres to the structure and dramatic line of the autobiography: from childhood through youth, to maturity and old age, tracing the actor's personal landmarks and professional triumphs. It juxtaposes the actor's monologue with dramatized episodes of his biography; archival footage of films, plays, and TV shows he participated in; old photos; interviews with his friends, colleagues, his son and his second wife. The film thus makes proper reference to real facts of his life and suggests that his social background and early experience could have determined his life choices.

This is not a film about socialism; rather, it is a screened biographical story of the life of an actor whose most active part spanned the socialist period. Social and political issues are only indirectly present in the personal story, which nevertheless, conjures the social and cultural life in Sofia during the second half of the twentieth century. It reveals the history of creation of some of the most famous Bulgarian films and unveils facts about the nature of power-culture relations at the time. Tsonev himself has not been a member of the BCP and in the documentary he talks openly about his discontent with the management of theatrical life in Bulgaria and with political patronage over the arts. However, he relates his personal and professional misadventures with humor and self-irony, and more importantly, it is self-contentment and personal gratification derived from a complete and worthwhile life that dominate the film. Here I should open a parenthesis. In contrast to the documentary, in his book, and especially in its final part, Tsonev gives a frank account of the position of compromise he had chosen. This is skipped over in the film but is hinted at in the undisguised pride of all his successes. Probably as a jubilee film it puts an emphasis on the end result, rather than on the sacrifice.

The third documentary—*Po osobeno zhestok nachin* (In an especially cruel manner)—relates the unusual fate of the author of some of the emblematic works of Bulgarian literature and cinema, Svoboda Bichvarova, presently residing in Brazil since 1989.²⁸ Once belonging to the generation of the “reasonable compromise,” her credo now is Christian faith. In the film she looks for salvation from the doubts that torment her about the sense of truth in a dialogue with the spirit of her father—Todor Angelov—a legendary hero of the European antifascist resistance, killed by Gestapo and proclaimed a national hero of Belgium. Two questions had been torturing her consciousness for decades: “How was it possible for my dad to not reach the truth?” and the second, crueler one:

²⁸ Among her most celebrated works are the films *Mezhdu relsite*, *Na vseki kilometir*, *Opasen char*, *Zhrebiiat* and the novels *Liturgiia za Ilinden* and *Zemia za pitsel*.

"Dad, why did you lie to me?" Tragedy has left its mark on the life of both father and daughter. He died defending his ideas, while she passed from devotion to the communist ideal through the realization of its illusionary character in order to ultimately find internal peace after a merciless self-examination. The viewer is involved in a historically broad but touching philosophical reflection over history and ideology, truth, illusions, and human values.

The film was released almost simultaneously with Bîchvarova's "documentary novel" *Po osobeno mîchitelen nachin* (In an especially painful manner).²⁹ In fact, the film's broadcast preceded the book. The authors of the film chose to give their work almost the same title which Bîchvarova criticized in an interview as ill-suited and misleading the reader to transfer ideas and impressions provoked by the film onto the novel. In addition, she claimed that these ideas do not coincide with her own thoughts and intentions and some points in the film rendition require her explicit explanation, in particular the ones relating to her parents. According to her, the film based on the autobiographical novel "has nothing to do with my book on the spiritual journey of my parents' generation. My novel does not consist of a series of lyric and memoir monologues set against the background of the exotic pictures of Brazil (selected according to the filmmakers' views)!" And besides that, the very formulation of questions such as "What shouldn't we forgive our parents" reminds Bîchvarova of "the triumphant Pharisaism of the victim" and her "Thank You, Lord, for I am not like him!"³⁰ Nonetheless, the writer's insights remain the same in both the film and the book: without compassion even the purest belief turns into fanaticism; rethinking one's life is both a road and a wandering; and it is the truth and the aspiration for it "that will bring us freedom and reconciliation."³¹

These three documentaries present three ways of remembering (and before that—of living in) socialism in Bulgaria, three attitudes toward one's private and public life. For the first two documentaries it can be expressed with the sentence "I regret nothing." Stefan Vîlkov, the old former political prisoner is proud that despite physical torture and moral pressure in prison he "kept his name clear." In the second film the old actor (almost of the same age) says: "I've been fighting all my life" and "I don't regret anything that happened." In the third one, the main character's life path runs through regret to repentance for the mistakes and illusions, and finally reaches contentedness in religion and human humility. These three confessions on the screen cannot belittle or replace each other for they are all possible and authentic, as were the lives that inspired them. It is difficult to separate in them recollection from balance, emotion from analysis, knowledge of history from the lessons of history. In contrast to the

²⁹ Svoboda Bîchvarova, *Po osobeno mîchitelen nachin*, 3 vols. (Plovdiv: Zhanet-45, 2008).

³⁰ Idem, "Nasila ne mozhesht da dadesh ... Online razgovor," *Kultura*, 19 November 2008.

³¹ Ibid.

beginning of the 1990s when Bulgarian cinematographers believed that cinema could “mend and change” the world, some twenty years after the “great changes,” the “polyphonic” Bulgarian cinema shows that life, both in its past and in its present, is a many-sided and dynamic process, while human individuals are “integrated and inseparable” and realize themselves “in the entirety and complexity of their life and social experiences.”³²

³² Kabaivanov, “Sivremennoto bŭlgarsko dokumentalno kino,” 27.

26. The Revolution of 1989 and the *Rashomon* Effect: Recollections of the Collapse of Communism in Romania

Dragoș Petrescu

I am one of the millions of witnesses to the Romanian Revolution of 1989, but not as a revolutionary. I involved myself in the turmoil only on 22 December, after I heard on TV that Ceaușescu had fled in a helicopter from the party headquarters in Bucharest. A fresh engineer in the city of Tîrgoviște, I remember that before this critical moment I merely anticipated that I was about to experience the worst face of the regime, which seemed to be preparing a large-scale repression. We knew that the revolt had already spread from Timișoara to Bucharest from a colleague, who was in the capital on 21 December and told us how he was caught up in the street demonstration, so he—willy-nilly—joined it and shouted slogans against the party leadership until he finally felt relieved. After that, he rushed to the railway station to catch the last train to Tîrgoviște. In the morning of 22 December, we could all see through the office window a long column of tanks going out of a nearby military base and heading toward Bucharest to crush the revolutionaries. However, what seemed to announce a tragedy turned soon into a masquerade. We all observed that quite a number of tanks actually stopped only several hundred meters from the gate of the military base and their crews tried desperately but unsuccessfully to make them run again. In the meantime, history accelerated itself in Bucharest, while in Tîrgoviște we lived in front of the TV a most surprising event: the Conducător (Ceaușescu's most frequent appellative, the Romanian for Führer, used mostly with a qualifier, such as beloved or wise) turned into a fugitive.

All at once, we discovered that we were experiencing a revolution. After embracing each other, jumping from joy and crying with happiness, we started to ask ourselves what is to be done. We all knew from history textbooks that revolutions are about the storming of the Bastille. So we rushed from the factory to our Bastille in Tîrgoviște: the local headquarters of the Communist Party in the center of the city. While on the road, I was thinking of possible models of revolutionary behavior, but our textbooks said nothing about ordinary individuals caught in such extraordinary circumstances. My only alternative source of in-

spiration was represented by Alexandre Dumas's novels on the French Revolution and its aftermath. Trying to remember something meaningful from such readings, it suddenly occurred to me that sooner or later revolutionaries would start to suspect each other of betraying the revolution. If so, I was in deep trouble because I did not have any ID. The previous day I had left it with the local militia station in order to extend my temporary residence permit in Tîrgoviște, so at that moment I had no means of identifying myself as an honest citizen supporting the revolution. If checked, I feared, I would be taken as one of the Securitate-trained counterrevolutionary terrorists with wiped-out identities, who were already shooting in the revolutionary crowd in Bucharest, as rumors had spread. (Actually, in a matter of hours, self-appointed individuals wearing a Romanian tricolor ribbon organized themselves to verify all cars and the identity of their drivers in order to trace potential enemies of the revolution. To whom such an idea occurred and how it spread is a mystery to me, but the result of this operation was the death of innocent people, killed because they refused to stop their cars.)

To prevent a disastrous turn, I first went to the militia station to take my ID, which was indeed given back to me in no time; in other circumstances I would have had to wait for a week to get it back. By the time I was finally ready for the revolution, Ceaușescu and his wife had been already caught on the road from Bucharest to—what a coincidence—Tîrgoviște. Since the success of the revolution seemed more secure, I rushed back to the factory to help the others defend it, just in case the Securitate would organize a counterattack overnight. They did not. As it turned out later, the Securitate troops did not act in Ceaușescu's support. Thus ended my first day of entanglement with the Revolution of 1989. Subsequently, I wrote a PhD dissertation on the collapse of Romanian communism that takes into account structure, culture, and contingency to explain this event. In my analysis, personal stories of the revolution as experienced by nameless individuals like me have no place. Even aggregated, such accounts cannot explain the regime change. It is this paper that tries to capture the multifaceted entanglements of millions of Romanians with this controversial event, which disrupted their ordinary routines and pushed them to experience the most extraordinary and unexpected event of their lifetime.

On 21 December 1989, a mass rally opened at noon in the Palace Square in downtown Bucharest. The rally was organized at the direct orders of the supreme leader of the Romanian Communist Party (RCP), Nicolae Ceaușescu, and was intended to unmask an alleged international conspiracy against communist Romania. As the supreme leader of the RCP had stated in his radio-televised address the previous evening, the mass protests sparked in the city of Timișoara a few days earlier were the work of "hooligan elements" linked with "reactionary, imperialistic, irredentist, chauvinistic circles and the intelligence

services of different foreign countries.”¹ While addressing the meeting and asking for “force and unity in defending Romania’s independence,”² Ceaușescu was interrupted by yells coming from amid the crowd. Shouts of “Timișoara!” were heard and there was a small explosion. Shortly afterwards, a large TV camera, belonging to the state television network, crashed with a loud noise.³ Romanian Television, which was broadcasting the event live, interrupted its transmission immediately and resumed the program a few minutes later. To Ceaușescu’s stupefaction, loud cries could be heard again and shortly afterwards the majority of the participants were desperately trying to leave the place. Confused, Ceaușescu—who was delivering his speech from the main balcony of the building of the Central Committee (CC) of the RCP—tried in vain to calm down the people by promising them a ridiculous raise in salaries. Nobody listened to him. For the first time under communist rule, an official mass rally ended abruptly in turmoil. The time was about 12:50 on 21 December 1989.

During my doctoral studies at the Central European University in Budapest, I had the chance to meet Dan Țura, a participant in the University Square demonstration on 21 December, and listen to his amazing story about the beginning of the 1989 revolution in Bucharest. I realized that his vivid recollections of his participation in the open protest represented in fact that special kind of account of an exceptional individual experience that practitioners of *microstoria* call *l’eccezionale normale*. On the one hand, his story represents a seeming anomaly within the general context of the bloody 1989 revolution in Romania. On the other hand, this story shows how ordinary people responded when history suddenly surged forward. After the Palace Square rally ended in chaos, a group of demonstrators gathered in the University Square and initiated a public protest. At the time, Țura was working at an institute near the square. When the protesters gathered there and started to shout anti-Ceaușescu and antiregime slogans, he joined them. He was aware that he was taking part in a revolution that was the experience of a lifetime, and he wanted to take full advantage of that unique opportunity. At the same time, that particular 21st of December was his payday. Țura shouted against the regime for a while and then returned to his workplace to find out if the payment of salaries had begun. The money had not arrived yet, so he returned to the University Square and rejoined the revolution. After some time he returned to the institute and was happy to find out that the money was finally there. He got his salary and his first thought was to go back, but he recalled that he had promised his family that he would buy a Christmas tree. He

¹ Reproduced in Aurel Perva and Carol Roman, *Misterele revoluției române: Revenire după ani* (Bucharest: Carro, 1991), 38–39.

² Quoted in Stelian Tănase, *Miracolul revoluției* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 1999), 267.

³ Costache Codrescu, ed., *Armata Română în revoluția din decembrie 1989*, 2nd rev. ed. (Bucharest: Militară, 1998), 111.

rushed to the closest market, the Amzei Market, bought the tree and returned to the University Square. Holding firmly the fir tree in one hand, he rejoined the protesters until dark, when the repression troops began firing at the demonstrators. He thought it was too dangerous to stay and ran home.⁴

Dan Țura's account of the beginning of the 1989 revolution in Bucharest reminds us of the confusion, uncertainty, and ambiguity that characterized the 1989 events in Romania due to the superposition of two streams of events. On the one hand, history began to accelerate after the outbreak of open contestation of Ceaușescu's rule and the chain of rapidly unfolding events it triggered; on the other hand, everyday life continued its normal course slowly and prosaically like in any other day. The Romanian Revolution of 1989 consisted of two revolutions that unfolded almost simultaneously and often crossed their paths, influencing one another: a *bloody* revolution in the streets of a few major cities and a *thrilling* one witnessed by the majority of the population in front of their TV sets. Arguably, the Romanian Revolution of 1989 had three major features that made it so special in the context of the 1989 events in East-Central Europe (ECE): it *occurred unexpectedly*, *unfolded violently*, and had an *ambiguous outcome*.

Drawing on the four "modes of emplotment" identified by Hayden White, i.e., Romance, Tragedy, Comedy, and Satire,⁵ the present paper argues that contrary to the communist period in Romania, which is generally explained and remembered as a Tragic Romance, the revolution of December 1989 was a Tragicomedy, while the "mode in which it is cast,"⁶ was Satire or, more precisely, Self-Irony. In order to support this argument, the paper examines three highly acclaimed Romanian feature films released in the same year—2006, which tell three relevant stories about the inception, unfolding, and outcome of the 1989 regime change in Romania.

The paper is structured in two parts. The first part discusses the post-1989 public representations of the 1989 events and puts forward three major interpretations of the Romanian Revolution of 1989 as they have emerged from the testimonies, witness accounts, and written memoirs of a number of firsthand participants: (1) 1989 as an *authentic revolution*; (2) 1989 as a *confiscated revolution*; and (3) 1989 as an *international conspiracy*. Recollections by direct participants in the violent regime change in Romania of 16–22 December 1989 have fueled three major conflicting interpretations of the demise of communist rule that have engendered an enduring "*Rashomon* effect" in terms of public representations.⁷ As a conse-

⁴ Dan Țura, interview by the author, August 1999, Budapest.

⁵ Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, Md.: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), 7–11.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁷ The "*Rashomon* effect" refers to "contradictory truths," i.e., contrasting, though perfectly plausible, accounts by observers of contested events, rooted in subjective understandings of these events. This effect is named after the movie *Rashomon* (1950) directed by Akira Kurosawa, in

quence, the fundamental question that ceaselessly haunts the Romanians with regard to the bloody events of 1989 is: Was it, or was it not, a true revolution?

The second part discusses three cinematic narratives released in 2006: (1) *Cum mi-am petrecut sfîrșitul lumii* (The way I spent the end of the world), directed by Cătălin Mitulescu; (2) *Hîrtia va fi albastră* (The paper will be blue), directed by Radu Muntean; and (3) *A fost sau n-a fost?* (12:08 east of Bucharest), directed by Corneliu Porumboiu. Each of the three feature films addresses one of the three fundamental issues related to the Romanian Revolution of 1989: its inception—*The Way I Spent the End of the World*; unfolding—*The Paper Will Be Blue*; and outcome—*12:08 East of Bucharest*. Together, these three cinematic narratives tell the story of the 1989 regime change as a sort of Self-Ironical Tragicomedy, which is conspicuously different from the way the communist period (1945–1989) is generally explained, i.e., as a Tragic Romance. Through a reading in reverse order of the three cinematic narratives one can get a rather accurate image of the current debates, fueled by the recollections of the participants.

Revisiting the 1989 Events: Testimonies, Witness Accounts, Memoirs

The communist power elite in Romania proved to be monolithic until the very end of the regime, while the political opposition was not able to structure itself sufficiently to emerge as a strong contender for power during the revolution. The first free elections held on 20 May 1990 were won by second- and third-rank *nomenklatura* members, who constantly defined themselves as a “genuine” emanation of the 1989 revolution. Sparked unexpectedly and violently, the 1989 revolution eventually brought to power a mixture of communist reformers and technocrats under the leadership of a former apparatchik, Ion Iliescu. As a consequence, disaffection with the newly established power elite and with the overall outcome of the 1989 revolution was particularly high among the educated urban strata.

While the bulk of the population continued to support the “neocommunists,” the political opposition supported by public intellectuals and the emerging civil society articulated two conflicting visions of the post-1945 period, in which the interpretation of the recent past (the communist period from March 1945 until

which the murder of a Japanese nobleman is described by three witnesses, as well as by the victim himself via a medium, in mutually contradictory ways. Kurosawa’s movie is based on two short stories by Ryunosuke Akutagawa (1892–1927), “In a Grove” and “Rashomon.” See Karl G. Heider, “The *Rashomon* Effect: When Ethnographers Disagree,” *American Anthropologist*, n.s. 90, no. 1 (1988): 74; and Wendy D. Roth and Jal D. Mehta, “The *Rashomon* Effect: Combining Positivist and Interpretivist Approaches in the Analysis of Contested Events,” *Sociological Methods & Research* 31, no. 2 (2002): 131–73, available at <http://www.politics.ubc.ca/fileadmin/template/main/images/departments/soci/faculty/roth/RashomonEffect.pdf>.

December 1989) differed fundamentally from that of the immediate past (the violent regime change of 16–22 December 1989). The vision of the communist period centered on prisons, surveillance, and shortages; this was instrumental in stressing the continuities between the Ceaușescu and Iliescu regimes in an attempt at convincing the population not to vote in the next general elections for Iliescu and his National Salvation Front (NSF). At the same time, the democratic opposition and the emerging civil society adopted an overcritical approach to the 1989 regime change by contesting, if not utterly denying, its revolutionary nature. This was prompted by the fact that Iliescu's "neocommunists" spoke of 1989 as a true revolution and presented themselves as authentic revolutionaries. Foreign scholars were equally critical. Timothy Garton Ash wrote in 1999 that the Romanian Revolution of 1989 "was the only one that wasn't."⁸ He was by no means alone in his sharp criticism of the nature and outcome of the 1989 events in Romania. Some have put the word *revolution* in quotation marks in order to emphasize its ambiguities, while others went even further and stated openly that in December 1989 Romania witnessed a mere coup d'état.

It is important to stress that more blood was spilled in Romania after the collapse of the communist regime (dated by the majority of analysts at precisely 12:08 on 22 December 1989, when Ceaușescu's helicopter took off from the upper platform of the building of the CC of the RCP), than before its demise. Innocent people were killed by unidentified "terrorists" between 22 and 25 December 1989, i.e., from the moment the Ceaușescu couple left the CC building to face a hasty execution after a mock trial. Another important note is that out of the total number of victims officially registered in the 1989 events, i.e., 1,104 dead and 3,321 wounded, 944 died and 2,214 were wounded after 22 December.⁹ The intricacies of the Romanian Revolution of 1989 led to the emergence of various interpretations. The testimonies and witness accounts of direct participants in the events tend to support three major interpretations: (1) *1989—An Authentic Revolution*. According to this interpretation, the 1989 events represented a genuine revolution initiated by the spontaneous mass revolt of the population, especially in Timișoara and Bucharest. This view has been shared since December 1989 by numerous representatives of the newly established NSF and a major part of the revolutionaries who poured into the streets and confronted the repressive forces; (2) *1989—A Confiscated Revolution*. This interpretation emerged during the first half of 1990. It was put forward by dis-

⁸ "Curiously enough the moment when people in the West finally thought there was a revolution was when they saw television pictures of Romania: crowds, tanks, shooting, blood in the streets. They said: 'That—we know that is a revolution,' and of course the joke is that it was the only one that wasn't [emphasis added]" (Timothy Garton Ash, "Conclusions," in *Between Past and Future: The Revolutions of 1989 and Their Aftermath*, eds. Sorin Antohi and Vladimir Tismăneanu [New York/Budapest: Central European University Press, 2000], 395).

⁹ Stan Stoica, *România, 1989–2005: O istorie cronologică* (Bucharest: Meronia, 2005), 19.

enchanted critical intellectuals and revolutionaries and was endorsed by numerous bystanders who watched the 1989 events on TV. This interpretation maintains that the popular revolt was confiscated by second- and third-rank *nomenklatura* members who benefited mainly from Soviet support and, thus, the 1989 revolution was never completed. This view became better articulated after the victory of the NSF in the first postcommunist elections of 20 May 1990 and the repression of the protesters at the University Square in Bucharest on 13–15 June of the same year. (3) *1989—An International Conspiracy*. This interpretation contends that the events of 1989 were the direct result of an international conspiracy conducted from abroad by the intelligence agencies of the two superpowers with the complicity of some party factions, the secret police, and the military. It has been supported mainly by former members of the communist secret police (the Securitate) and the military, as well as by journalists.¹⁰

(1) For the prominent members of the NSF who served under the Ceaușescu regime, their participation in the 1989 regime change on the side of the revolting masses constituted the only legitimizing element for continuing their careers under the new political order. For them, what happened in December 1989 was nothing but a true revolution in which they took an active part. For their part, most of the genuine revolutionaries who demonstrated against the regime from 21 December 1989 onwards and faced the bloody repression have clearly favored the interpretation of the events as a revolution.

High-ranking members of the first postcommunist regime, such as President Ion Iliescu or Prime Minister Petre Roman, wrote in their memoirs about their involvement in, and the nature of, the 1989 revolution. Iliescu has constantly affirmed that what happened in 1989 was a revolution sparked by the popular uprising in Timișoara and completed by the population of Bucharest, which poured onto the streets in large numbers on 22 December.¹¹ In his memoirs, Roman supports the idea of a genuine revolution but underscores that the population was not prepared for such an event and this led to much vacillation and guesswork.¹² Silviu Brucan, a close collaborator of Iliescu and a key figure of the NSF in the early 1990s, also supports the revolution thesis.¹³ Sergiu Nicolaescu, a post-1989 politi-

¹⁰ A detailed taxonomy of the discourses on the 1989 events written from the perspective of literary studies has been authored by Cesereanu, who classifies the discourses on the 1989 Revolution as follows: (1) The purists: 1.1 Those in power, 1.2 Those outside the power circle, and 1.3 Other voices; (2) The conspiracy theory: 2.1 The external plot, 2.2 The internal plot; and (3) The thesis of a revolution hybridized with a coup d'état. See Ruxandra Cesereanu, *Decembrie '89: Deconstrucția unei revoluții* (Iași: Polirom, 2004), 63–180.

¹¹ Ion Iliescu, *Revoluție și reformă* (Bucharest: Enciclopedică, 1994), 12–13; idem, *Revoluția trăită* (Bucharest: Redacției publicațiilor pentru străinătate, 1995), 13.

¹² Petre Roman, *Libertatea ca datorie* (Cluj: Dacia, 1994), 105.

¹³ Brucan was a former *nomenklatura* member who rose to prominence under Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej and was marginalized by Ceaușescu; he became critical toward Ceaușescu's rule in

cian close to Iliescu, has provided his own account of the "historic moment" that occurred on 22 December between 16:00 and 17:30 when the protesters gathered in front of the CC of the RCP building and turned the anti-Ceaușescu revolt into an anticommunist revolution.¹⁴

As far as the revolutionaries in the streets are concerned, one should mention Marius Mioc who has been extremely active in researching and disseminating firsthand information about the 1989 revolution in Timișoara. Time and again, Mioc has affirmed that in 1989 Romania witnessed an authentic revolution. Due to his constant efforts numerous witness accounts and documents related to the inception of the 1989 revolution have been published.¹⁵ Writer and journalist Stelian Tănase wrote about his 1989 revolutionary experience in Bucharest. He recalled the moment when he reached the Magheru Boulevard shortly after the Bucharest protests had started: "The Magheru Boulevard was blocked by the special brigades equipped with shields and helmets and, some meters away, were hundreds of people who shouted, indeed, 'Ceaușescu,' but... 'Down with!' My first sensation was that of astonishment." It was amazing, Tănase observed, to see how rapidly people in the street became radicalized and organized themselves.¹⁶

(2) Democratic political opposition to the NSF and the emerging civil society, as well as numerous disenchanted critical intellectuals and scholars from Romania and abroad, have been at the origin of the interpretation of the 1989 events as a revolution initiated by the population of Timișoara, which was subsequently "confiscated" in the capital city Bucharest. According to this version, the 1989 events unfolded in two phases: the genuine revolution in Timișoara was followed by a coup d'état in Bucharest. This interpretation has been supported by participants in the events, by journalists, and by significant numbers among the general public. Talk shows have concentrated on scenarios that proved to be extremely popular with large audiences: for example, the series of fifteen TV roundtables hosted by journalist Vartan Arachelian on the "myster-

the late 1980s. Silviu Brucan, *Generația irosită: Memorii* (Bucharest: Universul & Calistrat Hogaș, 1992), 208–19.

¹⁴ Nicolaescu was a very successful film director under the Ceaușescu regime. Sergiu Nicolaescu, *Revoluția—Începutul adevărului: Un raport personal* (Bucharest: Topaz, 1995), 50.

¹⁵ From the many works authored or edited by Marius Mioc one can mention *Revoluția din Timișoara și falsificatorii istoriei* (Timișoara: Sedona, 1999); *Revoluția, fără mistere: Cazul László Tökés—Documente din arhiva Judecătoriei Timișoara; Documente din arhiva parohiei reformate Timișoara; Mărturii* (Timișoara: "Almanahul Banatului," 2002); *Procesele revoluției din Timișoara, 1989: Documente istorice* (Timișoara: Artpress, 2004); *The Anticommunist Romanian Revolution of 1989—Written for People with Little Knowledge about Romania* (Timișoara: Marineasa, 2004); and *Revoluția din 1989 și minciunile din Jurnalul Național: Mitul agenților străine, Mitul Securității atotputernice* (Timișoara: Marineasa, 2005).

¹⁶ Stelian Tănase, "Solstițiu însingurat la București," in *Șocuri și crize* (Bucharest: Staff, 1993), 5 and 9.

ies” of the 1989 revolution, whose transcripts were subsequently published in a volume. During one of the roundtables, a journalist said bluntly: “A revolution that started in Timișoara was killed by a coup d’état.”¹⁷ In a similar vein, Dumitru Mazilu, a former second-rank *nomenklatura* member who became critical toward Ceaușescu’s rule in the 1980s, has argued in his memoirs that the 1989 revolution was simply “stolen.” Mazilu, who was coopted to the leadership of the NSF on 22 December 1989 after the fall of Ceaușescu, distanced himself from Iliescu in January 1990.¹⁸ The idea of a “stolen” or “diverted” revolution has been generally expressed by a large number of Romanian and foreign authors who use the term *revolution* in quotation marks.¹⁹

(3) After 1989, conspiracy theories and absurd scenarios also filled the pages of the newly established newspapers, journals, and magazines. Numerous publications nurtured the idea that the Ceaușescu regime was brought down by a conspiracy involving major foreign secret services, including the KGB and the CIA, with the support of local party figures, the military, and the secret police.²⁰ The thesis of an international conspiracy has been principally supported by former Securitate agents, as well as by employees of the postcommunist secret services. For instance, Filip Teodorescu, a former deputy head of the Counterintelligence Section of the Securitate, asserted in his memoirs that the violent events of December 1989 were stirred from outside the country following an agreement between “the West and the East,” i.e., between the United States and the Soviet Union.²¹ Nicolae Mavru, the former head of the Surveillance and

¹⁷ Statement by journalist Sorin Roșca Stănescu. See Vartan Arachelian, *În fața dumneavoastră: Revoluția și personajele sale* (Bucharest: Nemira, 1998), 243.

¹⁸ Dumitru Mazilu, *Revoluția furată: De la totalitarism spre libertate—Memoriu pentru țara mea* (Bucharest: Cozia, 1991). Similarly, former dissident Dorin Tudoran, who was forced to emigrate to the United States due to his critical stance toward the Ceaușescu regime, stated that in December 1989 a coup d’état hindered the popular uprising from becoming a revolution (Dorin Tudoran, *Kakistocrația* [Chișinău: Arc, 1998], 519). In a similar vein, a gifted émigré analyst of the communist power in Romania has argued that the second echelon of the *nomenklatura* confiscated a revolution carried out mainly by the anticommunist young generations, and he coined the term “gunned-down revolution” to characterize the 1989 events in Romania. See Victor Frunză, *Revoluția împușcată sau P.C.R. după 22 decembrie 1989* (Bucharest: Victor Frunză, 1994), 7–14 and 23–25.

¹⁹ To emphasize the ambiguous character of the revolutionary events in Romania, some scholars put the term *revolution* in quotation marks. See Katherine Verdery and Gail Kligman, “Romania after Ceaușescu: Post-Communist Communism?,” in *Eastern Europe in Revolution*, ed. Ivo Banac (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1992), 117.

²⁰ A brief survey of the conspiracy theories put forward immediately after the fall of the Ceaușescu regime has been provided in Perva and Roman, *Misterele revoluției române*.

²¹ Filip Teodorescu, *Un risc asumat: Timișoara, decembrie 1989* (Bucharest: Viitorul Românesc, 1992), 43–51. For the idea that an international conspiracy led by the CIA and the KGB provoked the fall of Ceaușescu in 1989, see Cornel Armean, *De ce a fost ucis? Ar fi împlinit 75 de ani* (n.p.: Alfabetul, 1993), 164–65.

Investigation Section of the Timișoara branch of the Securitate, sets forth a similar version insisting on Soviet involvement,²² while a volume authored by Valentin Raiha denounces the 1989 events as a coup d'état organized by the military with the support of the Soviet Union.²³ Witness accounts by participants in the revolution have supported such views. For instance, Constantin Vasile's book, which focuses on the unfolding of events in the city of Sibiu, concludes that Romania witnessed in 1989 a coup d'état organized by the military.²⁴ Alex Mihai Stoenescu features prominently among the authors who consistently supported the thesis of an international conspiracy that provoked the demise of the Ceaușescu regime in 1989. In a book-length interview by Stoenescu with Virgil Măgureanu, the first director of the postcommunist Romanian Intelligence Service (Serviciul Român de Informații [SRI]), Măgureanu and Stoenescu agree that foreign secret services were implicated in the initiation of the mass protest in Bucharest on 21 December 1989.²⁵

In light of these interpretations emerging from recollections of participants and bystanders, one has to provide a convincing answer to the question whether or not the 1989 events, which possessed the crucial ingredients of a great, classic revolution—violence and bloodshed—constituted a true revolution.

Remembering 1989: Was It (or Was It Not) A True Revolution?

As shown above, the political opposition, the emerging civil society, and public intellectuals were not able to persuade the bulk of the population to vote for the "democratic opposition" instead of Iliescu's "neocommunists." Until 1996, when the united opposition came to power, dissatisfaction with the outcome of the 1989 regime change was accompanied by appeals to proceed to a new revolution, meant to finally oust the "neocommunists" from power. That particular political context gave rise to the general view of the Romanian Revolution of 1989 that calls for qualifiers in order to stress its ambiguities, if not utter failure. It should be emphasized once again that this reading, which has remained powerful to this day in spite of the power shift of 1996, was primarily due to the widespread disaffection with the *outcome* of the 1989 events among the urban educated strata. One should nevertheless note, as Garton Ash has perceptively argued, that this problem is common to the 1989 revolutions in general. As an

²² Niculae Mavru, *Revoluția din stradă: Amintirile fostului șef al Serviciului de Filaj și Investigație de la Timișoara* (Bucharest: Rao, 2004), 60–64.

²³ Valentin Raiha, *În decembrie '89 KGB a aruncat în aer România cu complicitatea unui grup de militari* (Bucharest: Ziua and Omega Press Investment, 1995).

²⁴ Constantin Vasile, *Noi am fost teroriști?! (Sibiu: Sibguard, 1995).*

²⁵ Virgil Măgureanu with Alex Mihai Stoenescu, *De la regimul comunist la regimul Iliescu: Virgil Măgureanu în dialog cu Alex Mihai Stoenescu* (Bucharest: Rao, 2008), 116–22.

astute witness and critic of the 1989 phenomenon, Garton Ash confessed that there is indeed a problem of assessing “in what sense this was a revolution” and aptly observed: “In fact *we always have to qualify it*; we call it ‘velvet,’ we call it ‘peaceful,’ we call it ‘evolutionary,’ someone ... calls it ‘rebirth’ not revolution, I call it ‘refolution’ [emphasis added].”²⁶

A sharp criticism toward such an attitude shared by most Romanian public intellectuals came in 2000 from a former dissident philosopher. That year, in the final round of the presidential elections in Romania Iliescu competed with the ultra-nationalist leader of the Greater Romania Party, Corneliu Vadim Tudor. The Hungarian intellectual and former dissident G. M. Tamás, who was born in Romania, addressed an open letter to his Romanian friends that sparked a heated debate and triggered responses from many public intellectuals. The most relevant responses, accompanied by Tamás’s open letter, were subsequently published in a volume.²⁷ In his letter, Tamás observed among other things that the Romanian intellectuals consistently denied the revolutionary character of the events of December 1989 because the outcome of the regime change was different from what they expected. In Hungary, Tamás further argued, the Revolution of 1956 also left numerous questions unanswered but nobody claims that it was not a true revolution. According to him, the Romanian intellectuals have destroyed the memory of a great accomplishment in Romanian history and with it, the founding myth of the new and democratic Romanian polity. As Tamás puts it:

The nonconformist Romanian intellectuality managed to materialize one of the most unbelievable achievements, a world record of universal value. Because you, my dear friends, who did not like the political consequences (unpleasant, indeed) of the revolution, managed to convince an entire world that the *revolution*, in fact, *did not even take place*, that it was about a trick, a fata morgana, a hallucination, a foul play, a prank and, by making use of the deceitful poetic means of negative mythologizing, succeeded in obscuring the biggest historical deed of the Romanian people only because, like in all revolutions, there was too much buffoonery, chatty talk, too much chaos. [Emphasis added]²⁸

The constant denial of the revolutionary character of the regime change determined to a great extent the way in which 1989 is remembered today. The process of remembering the revolution focuses almost entirely on its ambiguities and confusions and leads more often than not to the sheer denial of its revolutionary character. Furthermore, it is only the short time span of the collapse of communism (16–22 December 1989), and by no means the communist period

²⁶ Garton Ash, “Conclusions,” 395.

²⁷ See Mircea Vasilescu, ed., *Intellectualul român față cu inacțiunea: În jurul unei scrisori a lui G. M. Tamás* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002); for Tamás’s open letter, see 11–20.

²⁸ Ibidem, 16.

itself that allows for black humor and self-irony.²⁹ The three movies discussed here and released in 2006, marked the coming of age of a new and talented generation in Romanian filmmaking. No less importantly, they all touch upon the most controversial issues regarding the inception, unfolding, and outcome of the 1989 events in Romania. Each of the three movies addresses a crucial question related to the process of remembering the Romanian Revolution of 1989: (1) Who started it and how?; (2) What happened in those days of December?; and (3) Was it, or was it not, a true revolution?

The argument put forward in this section is the following: if one reads in reverse order these three cinematic narratives, one can gain valuable insights into the way the 1989 revolution is remembered in Romania. In retrospect, one can argue that the outcome of the revolution, i.e., the belated democratization and the tortuous transition to a market economy, made significant strata of the population question seriously the character of the 1989 events they actually witnessed. Did the events that permitted Iliescu's "neocommunists" to replace Ceaușescu's communists, while former Securitate agents and informers became prosperous business owners, constitute a "true" revolution? The title of the first movie directed by Corneliu Porumboiu (b. 1975) can be translated into English as: *Was It or Not?* The movie was internationally released under the name *12:08 East of Bucharest*. The film gives sufficient contextual evidence to imply that the action takes place in the small Moldavian town of Vaslui, where the 1989 revolution unfolded rather peacefully. The setting strongly resembles that of the 2003 Czech feature film on the 1989 regime change in former Czechoslovakia, *Městečko* (Small town), directed by Jan Kraus. "*A fost sau n-a fost?*" is not only the disarmingly simple question around which the whole movie revolves, but also the question that epitomizes the highly controversial legacy of the 1989 revolution. Sixteen years after the 1989 events, the local TV station organizes a talk show in an attempt at clarifying the matter. The host, Virgil Jderescu, has invited two guests in the studio. The first is Tiberiu Mănescu, a history teacher and a former critical intellectual with dissident leanings under

²⁹ The fall of 2009 represented a watershed in this respect due to the release of the movie *Tales from the Golden Age*, written and produced by Cristian Mungiu, which explains the communist period in Romania as a Satirical Tragicomedy. The movie has been divided in two parts and consists of several episodes directed by Ioana Uricaru, Hanno Höfer, Răzvan Mărculescu, Constantin Popescu, and Cristian Mungiu. The first part, released on 25 September 2009, is entitled *Tovarăși, frumoasă e viața!* (Comrades, life is beautiful!); the second part, released on 23 October 2009, is entitled *Dragoste în timpul liber* (Love in one's spare time). For more on the movie, visit its official website at <http://www.amintiridinepocadeaur.ro>. Cristian Mungiu has also directed *4 luni, 3 săptămîni și 2 zile* (4 months, 3 weeks, and 2 days), a glimpse of the communist period in Romania in terms of a tragic romance through the story of an illegal abortion set in the depressing atmosphere of the 1980s. Known as *4, 3, 2*, the movie won the Palme d'Or at the 2007 Cannes Film Festival; see further details at <http://www.4months3weeksand2days.com>.

the rule of Ceaușescu. The second guest is a pensioner, Emanoil Pișcoci. The purpose of the show is to determine if anybody dared to protest against the regime in the main square of the town *before* 12:08 on 22 December 1989. At 12:08 that day, the Ceaușescu couple fled by helicopter from the CC building in Bucharest, thus putting an end to the communist rule in Romania. For the citizens of Vaslui, if anyone had engaged in public protest in the main square before noon on 22 December, this meant that the small provincial town had witnessed a revolution. Obviously, the participants and phone callers during the show—a former Securitate officer, as well as ordinary people that more or less took part in the events on 22 December 1989—could not provide a straight answer. In the end, Pișcoci, the pensioner, who survived communism by muddling through, provides a perplexing theory of revolution by comparing the revolutionary wave to the streetlights in the evening: they gradually turn on, starting to illuminate first the center of the town and proceeding slowly toward the periphery. According to Pișcoci's theory, one can formulate the following answer to the initial question: to the extent that a 1989 revolution occurred in Bucharest, a similar one occurred in Vaslui, but with a slight delay.³⁰ Therefore, in order to find out if Romania witnessed a revolution in December 1989, one has to go back in time and revisit the events that took place in the capital city Bucharest, beginning with 21 December 1989.

The second movie, *The Paper Will Be Blue*, directed by Radu Muntean (b. 1971), follows the intricate chain of events on 22–23 December 1989 in the capital city Bucharest. The main character, Costi Andronescu, is a conscript and serves in the troops of the Ministry of Interior. Costi is part of a five-person patrol unit in a light armored vehicle, whose commander is Lieutenant Neagu, sent out to patrol the streets of Bucharest during the night of 22–23 December 1989. Costi has to choose between obeying orders and deserting in order to join the revolutionaries. While patrolling through Bucharest that night, he understands that his comrades and the commanding officer are reluctant to side openly with the revolutionaries. He decides to illegally run away from duty and join the revolutionaries that defended the building of the Romanian Television. However, to become a freedom fighter and be accepted as such by the people in the streets is by no means simple. Costi's attempt at joining the revolutionaries at the television building proves an equally risky enterprise. There is total confusion. Regular army troops joined by numerous civilians who were given Kalashnikovs face an almost invisible enemy: the alleged special squads of Arab warriors reportedly hired by the communist regime to guard the supreme leader of the party. Poorly trained and disoriented by the contradictory orders they receive, the army officers are completely overwhelmed by the situation.

³⁰ Details on the movie, including synopsis, cast, etc., are provided at <http://www.cinemagia.ro/filme/a-fost-sau-n-a-fost-15220>.

Everybody is afraid of the Arab "terrorists" and the Securitate special troops who, according to the persistent rumors, are extremely well trained and armed for urban guerilla warfare, and are determined to defend the Ceaușescu regime at all costs.

Costi fails to enter the television building, but finally joins a group that defends a nearby villa. He is soon considered a "terrorist" and barely escapes execution. In the meantime, his unit members are desperately trying to find and bring him back in order to avoid declaring him a deserter. They go to his parents, where they find Costi's girlfriend. Eventually, disappointed and frustrated, Costi arrives home where he meets his comrades. He decides to rejoin his patrol because his commander and colleagues proved to be against the regime. In the morning of 23 December, while trying to get to the headquarters of their unit, Costi and his colleagues are shot down by an army tank acting as a "revolutionary" military patrol. The tank opens fire because the light armored patrol did not provide the correct password: the one they were given was changed during the night. The scene of the killing opens and closes the movie. According to its official website, the movie "is the story of the loss of innocence by a generation and of a popular revolt that brought to light in equal shares what is best and worst in us. The spirit of solidarity, as well as the selfishness and wickedness accumulated in decades of frustration."³¹ In spite of the gloomy opening and ending, the movie offers room for pungent self-irony. For instance, while starting the night search for Costi, the patrol driver comments sarcastically on the revolutionary ethos of the Romanians: "Thank heavens it is a warm weather, otherwise bloody nobody would have gone out to accomplish the revolution."

The third movie, *The Way I Spent the End of the World*, directed by Cătălin Mitulescu (b. 1972), is about the period of late communism and the inception of the 1989 revolution. It vividly captures the atmosphere of late communism, dominated by the pervasive economic and moral crisis of state socialism. Nearly everything is in short supply but people are too afraid of the infamous and ubiquitous Securitate to articulate an open protest against the regime. The two protagonists are Eva, a seventeen-year-old girl who is experiencing her first love, and her brother Lalalilu, a seven-year-old grammar school pupil. While flirting at their high school, Eva and her boyfriend, Alexandru, accidentally hit a bust of Ceaușescu that breaks to pieces on the ground. Placed under family pressure, Eva's boyfriend eventually succumbs to self-criticism in front of a communist youth meeting. Eva, however, refuses to do so. She is expelled from high school and moves to a vocational school in the outskirts of Bucharest. There she meets Andrei, a clever but unassertive classmate who is determined to flee to the West through Yugoslavia. Eva also decides to leave Romania and they start training for the dangerous enterprise of swimming across the Danube

³¹ Visit for details the film's official website at <http://www.hirtiavafialbastra.ro>.

to Yugoslavia to head for Western Europe. Ultimately, only Andrei swims across the river and gets to the West. Standing on the Romanian bank of the Danube, Eva gives up on the risky endeavor and returns home.

Back there, people mumble against the rule of Ceaușescu but nobody dares to do anything. Paradoxically, the grammar school generation epitomized by Eva's brother Lalililu, saves the honor of an entire nation. The boy is selected to take part in a staged meeting in Bucharest on 21 December 1989 in order to reassert the population's "adherence" to Ceaușescu's policies. Lalililu sparks the Bucharest revolt by firing his tiny sling shot toward the nearby participants or, as the viewer can still imagine, toward Secretary General Ceaușescu himself. This is how the revolution began in Bucharest. Better still, the live televised transmission of the rally captures Lalililu's courageous deed to the profound amazement of his family and friends gathered at home in front of the TV. Shortly after the regime change, Eva leaves the country and finds a job as a hostess on a large sea cruiser, while Lalililu remains with their family in Romania.³²

Concluding Remarks

The Romanian Revolution of 1989 was not only violent, but also the most contested of all 1989 revolutions in Eastern Europe. The return to power of second- and third-rank *nomenklatura* members during the postcommunist period created deep frustration, especially among the educated urban strata. Since the bulk of the population voted with the "neocommunists" in the general elections of 20 May 1990, many intellectuals thought that teaching the population about the true nature of the communist regime would topple the "neocommunist" vote. Transitional history became a substitute for transitional justice, as well as a political instrument utilized by the democratic opposition in the political contest against Iliescu and the NSF. A typical side effect of this political context in the early 1990s was the emergence of a hegemonic narrative about the communist period focusing almost exclusively on prisons, surveillance, and shortages. This narrative aims at explaining the communist period in Romania as a Romance cast in a tragic mode, that is, a Tragic Romance. The Revolution of 1989, however, has been remembered and historically reconstructed in a contrasting way. The revolutionary character of the 1989 events was constantly contested and often denied. Even though blood was spilled in December 1989, the revolution and its ideals were ridiculed, often by former revolutionaries themselves. In terms of public representation, it is generally allowed and widely accepted to caricature the revolutionary dream of 1989.

³² Visit for details the film's official website at <http://www.sfirsitulumii.ro>.

The three feature films released in 2006 by directors who were born between 1971 and 1975 and thus have personal memories of late communism, provide an overall explanation of the 1989 revolution in Romania as a Self-Ironical Tragicomedy. Such an "explanation by emplotment" of the Romanian 1989 reads as follows: the process of remembering the 1989 revolution is determined by its disputable legacy. The conflicting readings of the Romanian 1989 emerged from: (1) the disenchantment of large segments of the population with the outcome of the revolution; (2) the contrasting stories of cowardice and courage, opportunism and altruism, personal tragedy and spontaneous humor, related to the actual unfolding of the December 1989 events; and (3) the sudden and unexpected start of the revolution that took almost everybody by surprise. The reading in reverse order of the three cinematic narratives suggests that although the pivotal question related to the 1989 events in Romania remains: "Was it, or was it not, a true revolution?" one can nevertheless understand better the intricacies, ambiguities, and the nature of the events when the genre associated with them is Tragicomedy and the "mode in which it is cast" is Self-Irony.

27. Remembrance of Communism on the Former Day of Socialist Victory: The 9th of September in the Ritual Ceremonies of Post-1989 Bulgaria

Nikolai Vukov

A glance back to one of the brightest holidays in the calendar of communist Bulgaria, the 9th of September, summons one of the most vivid memories of early childhood. This special state holiday would be appropriately marked by a rally and festive gatherings in central parts of cities and villages, and it also provided the occasion for guest visits between relatives living at distant locations. In the overall uniformity of lifestyles and consumption patterns, the holiday lunches and dinners hardly varied much and customarily involved meatballs and sausages, tomato salads or mashed potatoes, lemonade and home-made desserts. For a five- or six-year-old child, everything would be fine on such a day, should the child not have bad appetite and should not eating a meatball constitute the worst nightmare. But on a special day like this, with family, guests, and relatives around the table, a refusal to consume what was served would be utterly unacceptable. So, I remember myself drowned in tears at a garden table pelted with September sunshine, struggling for hours with every tiny meatball particle, and permitted to leave the table and play only after I had eaten all my food up. The day could not but turn into a most dreadful period, and my ultimate relief with overcoming the served portion of food was maybe comparable in importance to other victories that had taken place on this date.

My personal reasons for dedicating research attention to the remembrance of 9th of September in Bulgaria have nothing to do with my childhood memories of these traumatic lunches. Still, the scene unavoidably emerges whenever I return to this date. As a research impetus, however, I was guided by something else—tracing the transformations that occurred with some of the important holidays of the communist calendar in Bulgaria (such as May Day, International Women's Day, the day that marks the foundation of the Socialist Party in Bulgaria—the 2nd of August, and, naturally, the 9th of September) and the diverse sets of interpretations that swarmed upon them after 1989. All these holi-

days (together with many others) underwent substantial transformations in the post-1989 period, ones signified by the dissolution of the previous patterns of celebration and the accumulation of new and sometimes unexpected meanings. In my view, the fluctuating attitudes toward such days (and toward the 9th of September, in particular)—between rejection, indifference, nostalgia, and subversive readings—illustrate well the memories that people preserve of communism in the postcommunist years.

And, if the difficulties of reaching a consensus over whether to remember or forget are so serious at the level of official assessments, the register of individual memories is even more problematic—as personal associations and lived experience further complicate the forking paths of remembrance.

On 9 September 2009—the 65th anniversary of the coup that marked the beginning of communism in Bulgaria—the members of Bulgaria's Parliament honored with a minute of silence those who died in the twentieth century for the realization of their ideals. The act was an attempt toward national reconciliation and was preceded by a debate on how exactly to formulate its meaning: as a commemorative act solely to the victims of the communist regime, or as a memorial sign to all Bulgarians who died in repressions over the previous century. The suggestion of joint commemoration of both the victims of fascism and communism on the 23rd of August as in other European countries was not accepted and the 9th of September was eventually designated along the blurred reference to all who died "for their ideals." The decision provoked plenty of commentaries, as the common label applied to this date merged the memory of the victims of communism with that of their persecutors, as well as of other people who fought for establishing communism in Bulgaria. Instead of bridging the gaps opened by clashing positions on the significance of the 9th of September, the new decision displaced the concrete memory of the victims of communism with an unspecific commemorative horizon and relativized the history of the period after the Soviet Army's entrance in Bulgaria.

Aside from reservations surrounding the "reconciliatory" meanings of the day, the Parliament's decision of 2009 was perceived as yet another step at rehabilitating the communist regime and reading the communist past through the "revisionist lens." In the context of incomplete disclosure of the truth about the crimes of communism and of the secret files of the regime's collaborators, the search for "national reconciliation" appeared especially problematic. The Socialist Party's continuing celebrations of the 9th of September as a national holiday and a day of "liberation" additionally exacerbated difficulties to embrace it as a symbol of national unity in light of the widespread violence in the early days of September 1944. Inspired by the intention to overcome the conflicting interpretations around this day in modern Bulgarian history, the Parliament's decision indicated how difficult it is to reach a consensus and come to

terms with the date's heritage in a postsocialist context. Widely celebrated as the victory date, a "national holiday" and "the brightest day" in the communist calendar until the late 1990s, the 9th of September underwent a semantic and symbolic U-turn caused by the lack of agreement in the assessments of both professionals and ordinary people. Whereas the communist period offered consecutive reformulations from a "popular uprising" and "antifascist uprising" to a "socialist revolution," the period after 1989 spawned an abundant diversity of terms and meanings: coup d'état, military coup, a day of occupation, the end of Bulgarian independence, the beginning of the totalitarian period, the day of joining the empire of evil, and the beginning of a genocide. They uneasily coexisted with the reproduction of former references: the day of liberation from the fascist rule, the end of an authoritarian, dictatorial, and profascist regime, the joining of the anti-Hitlerite coalition, a Fatherland Front uprising, a people's democratic revolution.

The proper labeling and interpretation of this day opened a series of public debates fueled by contrasting arguments and sources: about the organization of the coup and the participation of communists in it¹; about the role of the Soviet army and government in manipulating the events toward the coup; about the scale and nature of violence and uncontrolled murders in the name of the Fatherland Front; about the number of victims before and after the 9th of September²; and about the responsibility and admitted guilt for the committed violence. One tendency saw the importance of the event exclusively in the Red Terror it unleashed; the other tended to overexpose certain positive achievements in the economy, culture, and science during later socialist decades. One side pointed

¹ The events of 9 September 1944 were curiously called an "antifascist uprising," but were organized by the same actors who carried out the coups d'état of 9 June 1923 and 19 May 1934 and were declared "fascists" by the communists. The uprising was a coup enacted only by several officers backed by the minister of defense of the "fascist" government. Communists were involved, but it was not a "communist coup"; this coup followed several years later when communists took power.

² The tally of the victims in the events before and after September 1944 has stirred some of the major speculations and debates among historians to date. Contested numbers aside, there were no doubt people who died on both sides of the "barricade" and most were killed without a trial. Estimates for the period before 1944 range between 29,210 deaths announced by the communist regime and 6,400 people (including the toll of the September uprising of 1923), according to calculations after 1989; the number of people placed in concentration camps varies respectively between 31,250 and 10,500. The number of dead and missing in 1944–1945 is reported around 30,000, mostly representatives of the intelligentsia. The list of repressed people includes also: 11,000 people sentenced by the *Naroden Súd* (People's Court), many of whom (around 1,500) received their sentences posthumously; 2,000 Bulgarian officers who faced repression after their return from the front; 2,000 Goryani, most shot without trial; and around 300,000 repressed during the forceful Macedonization in the Pirin region. Over one million were deprived of their property; and around 250,000 people passed through labor camps after 1944.

to the lack of democracy, political and economic freedom; censure of the press; and different forms of violence in imposing socialism. The other side emphasized the transformative impact on the entire Bulgarian state: industrialization and urbanization, cooperativization of land and modernization of agriculture, reforms in educations, health care, and social welfare. Viewed exclusively in light of the first months and years after the coup, or within an evaluative glance until the end of the 1980s, the 9th of September gave rise to controversial interpretations and a divided position of what to celebrate and what to commemorate on this day. Twenty years after the changes of 1989, it remains a prime example of semantic transformation as a special day, kicked "out of joint" after the fall of the communist regime, and of a troubled memory about what exactly this date signified in modern Bulgarian history.

This paper will provide an overview of the meanings piled upon this most important day in communist Bulgaria and the diverse sets of attitudes and interpretations surrounding it in the two decades after 1989. From the vantage point of the ambiguous nature of a "special day" in modern societies, i.e., either a holiday and/or a day of mourning, I will explore the twofold meanings of the 9th of September as a day to celebrate and/or commemorate. Whereas before 1989 it was an occasion for mass festivities and commemorations of the fallen for the advancement of the communist ideology, after 1989 its semantic content oscillated between the poles of victory over fascism and mourning for communist victims. Subject to different representations in the two decades after the changes, the meanings of this date were highlighted in the ritual acts that took place every year. Looking at these ritual activities and their coverage in several newspapers from the transition period (*Trud*, *Duma*, *Demokratiia*, etc.), I seek to explore how memory was transformed in the course of these ritual expressions, how it was substituted by new images and approaches, and how it changed from a "memory of communism" to a "memory about communism," and to memory that has no direct relationship to communism as a point of reference. This will permit me to view this day not simply as an occasion to rework key notions about the recent past, but also as a vehicle to steer remembering and forgetting through a set of ritual acts, and to negotiate between the diverging paths of individual memories and the fluid unstable grounds of official assessments.

Celebrations and Discontent

The marking of this special day in the first year after the changes was an explicit shift from the previous patterns of celebration. Needless to say, there were no manifestations and organized marches in the central squares of the capital and the major cities, but even the fresh memories about these public spectacles

were now avoided. Whereas for the people siding with the democratic opposition parties of the early 1990s these memories could be approached exclusively from an ironical standpoint, for the sympathizers of the Socialist Party they were an occasion to distance themselves from the past and supply alternative ways of celebration. In early September 1990 the Supreme Council of the Bulgarian Socialist Party invited the population to celebrate the forty-sixth anniversary of the antifascist victory in Bulgaria.³ The celebration was to take place with a big procession and a rally under the motto: "For unity against neofascism, for democracy and civic peace." Aside from overtly accusing political opponents of restoring fascism, violating democracy and ruining civic peace (a resonating allegation in the party's open declarations to this day), the defensive position of the party was expressed in the overall rhetoric of the celebration.⁴ The celebration marked the disappearance of the official parade and party greetings from the mausoleum stage and laid an explicit stress on commemorative elements in the ritual script. Starting from the "September 9 Square" (which in 1990 was not yet renamed "Democracy"), the procession headed toward the "Park of Freedom" (restored since 1991 to its former name, "Boris's Garden") and the Brotherly Mound of the fallen in the antifascist struggle. Along the way, wreaths and flowers were deposited to the Monument of the Unknown Soldier and the Monument of the Soviet Army. The celebratory segments were not effaced completely: several stages in the park hosted a rich cultural program in the morning and in the afternoon, and the day ended with a concert in the National Palace of Culture. In line with the burning topic at the time, there were campaigns to collect donations for the restoration of the Party House in Sofia, whose building suffered fire and partial destruction on 26–27 August 1990. The celebrations took place not only in the capital, but in most big cities with appeals to consolidate the efforts of the political parties toward a "peaceful transition to democracy."⁵

³ See, for example, the abundant announcements in the socialist daily, especially on 6 September, the day of the Unification of Bulgaria: *Duma* 156, 6 September 1990.

⁴ The invitation was addressed "To all who hate fascism and love freedom." "In this country—the party daily emphasized—they are millions." "The celebration of a great day in Bulgarian history can be modest, but dignified." *Duma* 158, 8 September 1990.

⁵ A mass procession on the streets of Burgas celebrated the 9th of September as "the day of victory over fascism in the Bulgarian lands." In Sliven the commemorative procession involved a special visit to deposit flowers at memorial sites in the Sliven Balkan. In Vidin flowers were deposited at the Soviet military cemetery and the day passed in solemn processions, entertainment programs, and screening of videos. Commemorative rituals in Mikhailovgrad were scheduled at the monument of the fallen in the antifascist struggle; events in Plovdiv were organized in front of the Brotherly Mound and the Alyosha Soviet Army Memorial. In Kazanlık and the nearby villages the celebrations followed the old traditions and involved preparation of votive meals (*kurbani*). As in other towns, the commemorative procession and concerts in Yambol involved donation campaigns for the restoration of the burned Party House in Sofia. *Duma* 158, 8 September 1990.

The key overtones in these first celebrations by the Socialist Party were generally preserved over the two decades after 1989, and the political messages were simply fine-tuned to the respective political context. The core of the ritual script remained largely intact, involving a solemn procession to major sites of partisan and antifascist struggle, speeches by party representatives, and celebration with concerts and feasts. The major celebration—the one in the capital—involved a procession from the Party House downtown to the Brotherly Mound in the Boris's Garden, where commemorative ceremonies, speeches, and ensuing festivities took place. The regular attendees were mostly socialist hardliners and elderly people voicing sharp social criticism. In the first years after 1989, however, the meetings and processions on 9th of September were attended by many other people who wished to demonstrate their opposition to the political developments after 1989 and to support the initiatives of the Socialist Party, sometimes even by former opponents of the regime.⁶ Their presence was interpreted as an attempt to manifest the changed profile of the Bulgarian Socialist Party and its opposition to the pre-1989 communist rule, to highlight the noble status of socialist ideas, and to emphasize the date's significance as resistance to fascism beyond political affiliations.

The symbolic content of the 9th of September was surpassed by the emergence of new issues for the Bulgarian society. In the context of the newly gained freedom of speech they acquired the additional resonance of social alert: the economic hardships and the upcoming difficult winter, the first waves of unemployment and the first strikes, disclosure about the suppression of the democratic opposition in the 1940s, and the sharp ruptures in the political spectrum with no hope for unity or consensus. These were made visible in the first clashes between people sharing different political views during public events on the 9th of September. In 1990, the socialist procession to the Brotherly Mound was harassed near the Military Club by a hundred citizens, who stood in the street with loud slogans: "Give us back our pensions," "KPSS-BKP" (Communist Party of the Soviet Union–Bulgarian Communist Party [a propaganda slogan of the communist period]). The peacefully marching socialists shouted back: "Fire starters," "Fascists," "We will send you to the camps."⁷ Other clashes occurred with members of the breakaway Bulgarian Communist Party that refused to change its policy and agenda after 1989; its leader, Vladimir

⁶ In the sober procession of 1990 in the capital, there were people such as Binka Zheliazkova, Khristo Ganev, and Valeri Petrov, known for their stance against the dictatorship methods of the previous government, who had suffered hardships for their honest position. *Demokratiia* 171, 10 September 1990.

⁷ *Demokratiia* 171, 10 September 1990. The clashes reported by *Demokratiia* were not violent and verged on caustic humor and irony. The police, however, interfered (justifying its actions with the previous announcements on television that all unsanctioned meetings will be dispersed) and members of the Union of Democratic Forces (UDF) were injured.

Spasov, held a separate party plenum in the museum of Georgi Dimitrov and made parallel processions to lay flowers at the monuments of Lenin and the Soviet Army. The political tension between former comrades stopped at mutual accusations and the celebration in the Park of Freedom was surrounded by general festivity.

A different outlook prevailed in the following year, when the associations gradually crystallized around another important track: the memories about the people killed in the aftermath of the 9th of September. As the day approached in 1991, the opposition and various political organizations insisted it was an occasion to commemorate and pay due respect to the victims of communism. The Podkrepa Labor Confederation appealed to all citizens to light candles in all homes in the evening of the 9th of September in order to commemorate the memory of the dead.⁸ The day began with a commemorative mass for the souls of the victims, held in Sveta Nedelia Cathedral in Sofia in the presence of victims' relatives, former émigrés, representatives of the Liberal Congress Party, and sympathizers of the democratic parties.⁹ This did not prevent BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party) from holding its celebration in Boris's Garden, where columns of partisans, veterans, and antifascists gathered again with flowers and red flags, singing partisan and Soviet war songs and insisting on the celebratory meaning of the day.

Another central issue in public discussions that year was whether the 9th of September should remain a national holiday, an official holiday, or neither. The socialist majority in Parliament voted against a move to change Clause 154 of the Labor Code concerning the 9th of September and the day was still an official holiday. The Socialist Party's argument for keeping it that way was that there were no qualified specialists who could supply a "truthful historical evaluation of this date."¹⁰ The general public was not impressed; people wanted to make a statement against the previous regime and went on strike, boycotting the holiday by actually working. The trade unions responded to Parliament's decision with the official statement: "Everybody will decide by conscience whether 9/9 should be an official holiday or not."¹¹ The pressure to remove the day from the calendar of official events was in direct connection with the arising debates about Bulgaria's coat of arms, bearing in the communist period a red band with the years 681 and 1944. A witty remark circulating in the early 1990s was that this was not a coat of arms, but a tombstone marking Bulgaria's birth and death.

⁸ *Demokratiia* 213, 7 September 1991.

⁹ The mass was held by the dean of Sofia University's Theological Faculty, Bishop Neofit, who prayed for the appeasement of the souls and delivered a speech on the meanings of freedom. *Demokratiia* 214, 9 September 1991.

¹⁰ *Demokratiia* 214, 9 September 1991.

¹¹ Free choice only increased the confusion and some people made a show of going to work, while others made a show of not working.

The removal of the date's official status led to a lapse of political disputes in the following two years. In 1993, the BSP celebrated the day as a national holiday; at least this was the explanation by one of the socialist leaders, Krasimir Premianov, delivered minutes before the start of the party celebration.¹² One act that undermined this conviction in the noble character of the date was the desecration of the monument of the Unknown Soldier with a painted red star and graffiti on the night before the 9th of September. The celebrations took place across the country, heralded by a ceremony in the Trîn region, where the day was declared an official holiday in the village of Slishovtsi, and the place was visited by high party officials. The celebrations in Sofia involved the festive gathering at the Brotherly Mound with speeches about the need to resist fascist intentions and to affirm the victory of socialism; the crowd sang the religious hymn "Mnogaia Leta" (Many years).

An occasion for larger celebrations, the fiftieth anniversary of the 9th of September in 1994 elicited a series of protest actions to condemn the celebrations and emphasize the date's morbid significance in Bulgarian history. The non-communist bloc involving thirteen parties, trade unions, and various organizations, distributed a protest appeal against the forthcoming celebrations by the Socialist Party. The Movement of Rights and Freedoms (DPS) appealed to the public to revisit the memory of the "Revivalist" years of terror, violence, and crimes against civic freedoms.¹³ The Sîedinenie (Unification) Committee distributed special appeals to all Bulgarians to counter the "black day" of the 9th of September with 6 September 1885, the day of Bulgaria's unification in order "to resurrect the faith of our people in its ability to stop the new attack of the communist tyranny."¹⁴ The committee proclaimed the intended celebration of the fiftieth anniversary a sacrilege against the victims of communism. It had to be—and indeed was—widely opposed by the population, with a long list of protesters, whose names and signatures were published in the newspaper *Anti*.

The Sîedinenie proclamation called for symbolic actions on the eve of 9 September 1994: "all those who hate communism, terrorists, and agents of the Red Soviet empire ... [should] switch off their TVs, switch off the lights and in front

¹² *Demokratiia* 210, 9 September 1993. According to Premianov, the 9th of September had the features of a national holiday because it was the peak of antifascism in Bulgaria and was a holiday of all antifascists and all republicans, as it gave the "impulse to establish a republican state rule in Bulgaria."

¹³ The document stated that the Bulgarian society needed to remember the victims of the "revival process" and not allow indifference to the triumph of neocommunism. *Demokratiia* 205, 8 September 1994.

¹⁴ The appeal listed the consequences of 1944 (political murders, the People's Court, nationalization, annihilation of agriculture, lies and propaganda, moral, political and economic devastation) and warned about the attempts of "former tyrants" to "eternalize their rule" through new forms of violence.

of a burning candle, read from a holy book like the Bible, the Gospel, Ivan Vazov's novel *Under the Yoke*, or by Zakhari Stoianov's *Notes on the Bulgarian Insurrections*."¹⁵ At the committee's initiative and with the wide participation of opposition parties, commemorative meetings were held across the country. In the capital, a mass in memory of the victims of "half a century of communist violence after 1944" was held in Sveta Paraskeva Church. A mourning rally started in the afternoon from the National Palace of Culture. Along the way, flowers and wreaths were deposited in front of the house of Stefan Stambolov (prime minister of Bulgaria in 1854–1895) and at the former National Police Directorate (Direktsiia Narodna Militsiia), where hundreds of victims were sent to their deaths. Wreaths and flowers were deposited at the Monument of the Unknown Soldier with a prayer for the appeasement of the souls. A mourning rally was also organized in Paris, where a mass was held in the Sveti Patriarkh Evtimiy Church in memory of the victims of communism in Bulgaria.¹⁶

The initiatives proclaiming the 9th of September "the blackest day in modern Bulgarian history" could not prevent the Socialist Party and affiliate organizations from celebrating it as the fiftieth anniversary of the victory against fascism. Preparations took weeks and erupted in a wave of celebrations, ceremonial depositing of flowers to antifascist and partisan monuments across the country, celebratory processions, speeches and cultural events. Admonitions by the opposition against the festive spirit on "this day of national mourning" were countered by insistence on its noble role for "defeating fascism in Bulgaria," its national significance for opening a new page in the country's history, and the various contributions that socialist rule brought to the country. All the attempts to reject the significance of this day were allegedly guided by intentions of restoring fascism, threatening to lead the country into murderous clashes. Socialist sympathizers instead kept stressing the disastrous days of the Second World War and the "fascist" character of all governments prior to 9th of September. Reports about the violence committed in the aftermath of the 9th of September were either completely denied and ignored during the anniversary events, or were mentioned in passing as the gross exaggerations of individuals and groups that sought to incite political tension.

¹⁵ The day's activities involved attendance of church memorial services for the communist victims: "Let us honor their bright memory with wheat, bread, and wine! Let's light a candle! Let our country wake up to the mourning obituaries of sorrow and national grief! May personal mourning flow into shared national contempt for the slayers!... May God have mercy on the victims of communism!"

¹⁶ The meeting there was attended by Prince Kiril Preslavski and government ministers. The priest emphatically praised the victims of the Orthodox Church after 1944. A special address from the heir of the royal throne, Simeon II, was read by the national secretary of the Tsarstvo Bilgariia (Kingdom of Bulgaria) Federation, Khristo Kurtev.

For their part, opposition parties did not miss the chance to emphasize the lack of repentance in the socialist political declarations and the symbolic violence against those who died or suffered persecution after 1944. Attempts to restrain some socialist celebrations were made at the regional level, but unsuccessfully due to vehement protests by the Socialist Party for violation of its rights to organize public events.¹⁷ Amid parallel celebrations and memorial events, or virtual neglect, other reinscriptions of the "victorious significance" of the 9th of September took ironic and humorous forms. Sparked during protest demonstrations and public rallies after 1989, it seemed the perfect vehicle for overturning the date's meanings on its fiftieth anniversary. In 1994 the Murgash National Committee held a backgammon competition at the central square in Sofia, formerly called "9th of September."¹⁸ The event was an outburst of humor and irony vis-à-vis former communist symbolism.¹⁹ The stage of Dimitrov's mausoleum, plastered with slogans and obituaries of people killed in the communist period, hosted funny performances of songs from the recent past, imitations of the deposed communist rulers, or simply parades in mock costumes.

The parallel observances of the 9th of September in sober, commemorative, celebratory, or ironic mood did not pass without clashes between different groups and individuals. Unlike similar occasions in 1990, these clashes clearly showed no possibility for consensus. Waves of disapproval against sites and events clad in the garment of "antifascist struggle" collided with a visible tendency of denial of the crimes committed during the communist period and the numbers and profile of the victims.²⁰ The political ruptures in the mid-1990s hardly promised grounds for reconciliation. Then President Zhelju Zhelev made

¹⁷ In Kîrdzhali, for example, the mayor did not accept the BSP's request for a public procession and recommended to the socialists to hold their rally and concert in a hall, not in the open. He justified this with fears of disturbing the public peace in view of expected alternative rallies by the opponents of the celebration. The socialists stated that the purpose of the rally was the 75th anniversary of the local party organization and they would not comply with the mayor's decision. Despite tension and the mayor's prohibition, the celebrations took place as planned.

¹⁸ *Demokratiia* 207, 10 September 1994.

¹⁹ The tournament was touted as the most important event of the last fifty years and included prominent politicians from the opposition parties, who played under the rhetorical veil of the partisan fight. There was a public auction for the backgammon table made fifty years ago by partisan activists, an auction of other objects and symbols from the recent period, and a "grunge fashion show from the Balkan mountains, Fall–Winter 1944–1994." People were advised to bring their own costumes and paraphernalia for the show—busts, red stars, medals, red-bound volumes, portraits of general secretaries, etc. They could auction these objects or use them in exchange for sunflower oil, which was critically missing from the Bulgarian market at the time.

²⁰ A symbolic "response" by (supposedly) Socialist Party members for the regular defiling of "their" monuments with graffiti and displeasing slogans, was not late to come. Two days after the mourning procession organized by "Sîedinenie" the memorial plaque to the victims of communism was partially broken and thrown away. *Demokratiia* 208, 12 September 1994.

a special address to the nation on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary.²¹ The address was published in the opposition newspaper *Demokratsia* and claimed that regardless of the date's controversial significance, the 9th of September should not be neglected, nor passed in silence.²² In an explicit balancing act between controversial views, Zheliu Zhelev spoke about the persecutions, the political oppression, and the slain partisans prior to 1944, as well as the mass graves, the labor camps, the destruction of democratic opposition, the crushing of agriculture after the Stalinist kolkhoz model, and the repressions during the so-called "revival process" in the 1980s. All this prevented the possibility for celebrating a "bright national holiday," recalling instead some of the greatest crimes committed against the Bulgarian people. Emphasizing the date's dividing potential in modern Bulgarian history, the president appealed to both sides to stop dividing the fallen in the political struggles into "ours" and "theirs," but to pursue national unity built on truth, repentance, and good will.

As one of the first attempts for establishing a discourse of reconciliation, the appeal by Zheliu Zhelev was especially needed in the context of the political turbulence in the fall of 1994. After mass protests against the government of Lyuben Berov, on the 9th of September Parliament accepted his resignation and opened the road for new elections. In the following year, the less tense political environment and the lack of a grand anniversary contributed to a much "calmer" observance of the 9th of September, involving again celebratory processions to antifascist monuments by socialists and mourning rallies and commemorative services in the churches organized by the Union of Repressed People. The political crisis struck again in 1996, when the economic collapse under the government of Zhan Videnov, the acting leader of the Socialist Party, escalated many public gatherings into civil protests.²³ More and more voices criticized the social policy of the government and the overall depression caused by the economic crisis led to nostalgic rehabilitation of the socialist period²⁴; even the head of the Antifascist Union spared no harsh words, saying that the Socialist Party "has enormous guilt before the Bulgarian people and needs to apologize because it allowed the collapse of our noble socialist system [sic]."

In the late 1990s, the mourning rallies for the victims of communist terror continued in many towns with flower depositions at memorial sites, mourning music, and black bands on the national flags. In the capital, the presence of major figures

²¹ Among other things, the address was caused by the criticism the president received by the Socialist Party for his refusal to head the committee for the anniversary celebrations.

²² *Demokratsiia* 206, 9 September 1994.

²³ Fearing public disgrace, Videnov evaded the rally and concert in Plovdiv and his role as keynote speaker was taken by other party members.

²⁴ In the words of Velko Vîlkanov, it was a "golden century in Bulgarian history when the bread was 15 stotinki and the state had money for everyone." Fifteen stotinki is currently the equivalent of 7 eurocents—N. V.

from the Union of Democratic Forces at the sober ceremonies in the Sveta Sophia Church became a tradition, regularly reported by the media. On 11 September 1999, a memorial chapel was unveiled near the National Palace of Culture; the marble wall behind it is filled with the names of thousands of victims of the communist regime. The day of the former socialist victory was turning into an occasion for raising monuments to the victims of communist rule.²⁵ Another important development was that the 9th of September was gradually supplanted and overshadowed by the Day of Bulgaria's Unification, celebrated on the 6th of September. Long neglected during the communist period due mostly to its unconcealed royalist meanings and irrelevance to Communist Party activities, the date was restored as a prominent national holiday in the early 1990s. The state supported the celebrations and the symbolic significance of territorial unification, achieved as a feat of the entire nation, made the 6th of September one of the strongest "rivals" of the day of the socialist victory.²⁶ By the end of the 1990s the public events and the media coverage on the two days clearly showed that the 9th of September was losing momentum in favor of the restored national holiday.

The beginning of the new millennium brought a new set of political players (monarchists and nationalists, among others) that differed from the customary division during the 1990s between socialists and their opponents. Having started with memorial ceremonies abroad for the victims of communist terror and celebrations of the 6th of September,²⁷ the presence of monarchist groups in Bulgaria grew inseparable from the mourning rallies on the 9th of September and was a key point of public visibility for the National Movement Simeon II that was about to gain power in 2001. A similar process was taking place in the radical wings of the leftist movement, which started using the 9th of September to manifest their stance against postsocialist transition and EU integration. In

²⁵ In 2000, a memorial plaque to the victims of communism was unveiled in Razgrad. The monument was made of black granite and marked the site where in 1945 local priests and intellectuals were killed for their beliefs. Another monument in Varna represented an eight-meter cross with a four-leaf clover. In the following years all such memorial sites became major foci of commemorative activities for the victims of communist terror.

²⁶ The contrast between the two days was frequently discussed by newspapers with anticommunist agendas. The unifying character of the 6th of September (joining together ordinary people, the royal figure [Alexander Battenberg], priests, and the army for the national cause) was opposed to the 9th of September as "a day of separation, anti-Bulgarian spirit and revenge with foreign songs and raised fists, with foreign red flags; suppressed honor and ruined national dignity; death to the people's enemies; ideological and party vengeance" (*Demokratiia* 205, 8 September 1994).

²⁷ See, for example, the monarchist procession on 6 September 2000, whose route and script largely copied the mourning marches on the 9th of September. The procession was organized by "Siedinenie" and the Obedineni Monarhisti (United Monarchists) movement. It started from the National Palace of Culture in Sofia, laid wreaths at the monuments of Stefan Stambolov and the Unknown Soldier, and continued to the Mausoleum of Prince Battenberg, where the leaders of the monarchist movement and "Siedinenie" delivered speeches (*Trud* 244, 7 September 2000).

2000, members of the Che Guevara youth revolutionary movement attended the rally on the 56th anniversary of the 9th of September at the Brotherly Mound in Sofia and, signing revolutionary songs, burned the flag of the European Union.²⁸ The Bulgarian Socialist Party distanced itself from the “revolutionaries” and its leaders accused the Communist Party for the provocation. The participation of such groups in the major holidays of the socialist calendar²⁹ indicated the gradual swarming of radical left ideas around this date and the building of tension that could easily erupt in violence.

The 9th of September held special importance for the radical right and nationalist movements, too, offering a convenient occasion to push their agenda and gain visibility at the height of media attention. One of their first appearances was during the socialist celebration near the Brotherly Mound in Sofia in 2001. After the deposition of flowers at the monument, a group of four to five young people carrying slogans with swastikas and waving the national flag started shouting “Red fascists!” and broke the one-minute silence for those who died in the fight against fascism. The participants in the rally were appalled and within minutes, veterans and elderly antifascists gathered strength to silence the intruders.³⁰ On the following year, these groups returned again and have since established a regular presence at the celebrations of the 9th of September; the date has become a major venue of political expression for sympathizers of nationalist and right-wing parties in Bulgaria.

The year 2001 introduced another point of debate in the memories about the 9th of September: nostalgia for the communist period. On the eve of this special date, a monument to Todor Zhivkov was unveiled in his native town, Pravets, as part of the celebrations of the former leader’s ninetieth anniversary. Friends, relatives, and fellow townsmen of Zhivkov gathered in his native town, laid flowers at the memorial plaque there and observed a minute of silence in his memory. A photo exhibition about him opened at the Pravets historical museum.³¹ Both the inauguration of the monument and the exhibition were widely attended by people from neighboring towns and villages as well as high-ranking

²⁸ Brandishing Soviet Union flags, the group was shouting: “NATO Out!,” “Death to the European Union!,” and “Expel the treacherous powers of the Socialist International!” (*Trud* 247, 10 September 2000).

²⁹ Since the late 1990s, these groups have regularly appeared in the celebrations of the May Day and the 2nd of June, the memorial day of all Bulgarian dead, previously associated chiefly with antifascist resistance. Their involvement has expectedly troubled the other participants and has led to clashes with the police, causing subsequent political declarations of “distancing” from their messages.

³⁰ The group was well equipped with rotten tomatoes and eggs, but could not stage a “real” fight and the police actually interfered to save the intruders. *Trud* 244, 10 September 2001.

³¹ The exhibition included famous pictures with Brezhnev, Yuri Gagarin, Fidel Castro, and Pope Paul VI. There were also a lot of photos after 10 November 1989—from the trial against Zhivkov and meetings with politicians and state officials during the years he spent in home arrest.

politicians.³² The celebrations of Zhivkov's birthday reignited discussions about the remembrance of the socialist period and the legitimacy of nostalgia for the preceding decades. Aside from the act of commemorating the leader, interpreted by many Bulgarians as a "sacrilege," especially controversial were the public speeches and pronouncements exalting Zhivkov's period and engulfing his rule in the mood of collective amnesia.³³ Vehemently opposed by sympathizers of the other political parties, the celebrations spurred a wave of documents and accounts in the press about the oppression under Zhivkov's regime.

The dividing line of interpreting Zhivkov and his rule was transferred immediately to the discussions of the 9th of September, where again the two opposing views could not reach reconciliation.³⁴ Whereas socialists celebrated with festive gatherings and tourist marches, the Union of the Repressed People and six other anticommunist organizations commemorated those persecuted and killed by the communist regime.³⁵ The debate about the problematic remembering of Zhivkov continued in 2002 with the exhibition of his presents from all over the world in the museum in Pravets, and erupted again in 2004, when the BSP organized the celebration of Zhivkov's birthday on the Day of Bulgaria's Unification, the 6th of September.³⁶ This merging of the two celebrations stirred vehement opposition among different political groups who submitted a declaration to the National Assembly condemning it as an attempt to create a cult of totalitarian holidays, symbols and rhetoric.³⁷

³² The participation of soldiers at the inauguration of the monument raised speculations about a state-supported initiative, but the head of the army, General Mikho Mikhov, denied this, clarifying that they were only guards. *Trud* 244, 10 September 2001.

³³ Despite more balanced statements such as: "We cannot get rid of these thirty-three years of our lives: the future generations need to remember both the good and the bad about them," the overall atmosphere of the celebrations confirmed Zhivkov as "the greatest Bulgarian statesman," arousing nostalgia for the times when "there was peace, quiet and security in the country" (*Trud* 243, 8–9 September 2001).

³⁴ The leading article in *Trud* reported that the socialists celebrated this "bright date," whereas the organization of the repressed marked the "beginning of totalitarianism" (*Trud* 244, 10 September 2001).

³⁵ In Ruse, for example, the socialists celebrated with a hike to the local chalet Prista, and in Vratsa people followed a mountain trail in the steps of Ivan Todorov-Gorunia, venerated also as a fighter against Zhivkovism, and the partisan unit of Gavril Genov. The celebrations in Sofia were in front of the Brotherly Mound in Boris's Garden. In contrast, a commemorative ceremony and a liturgy for peace were held in the Sveta Sophia Church and a mourning rally with burning candles was organized by the Istina Union in front of the monument of communist victims near the National Palace of Culture. Together with the proclamation that the 9th of September was "the blackest day" in modern Bulgarian history, the participants insisted on full access to the archives of the former State Security Service and disclosure of perpetrators of persecution and torture.

³⁶ *Trud* 249, 8 September 2004.

³⁷ Taking grounds in the Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria, the declaration, prepared by the leaders of the Union of Democratic Forces, Nadezhda

Aside from being an occasion for events that affirmed a somewhat ironic, but distanced and dispassionate approach to the socialist period,³⁸ the 9th of September continued to hit a nerve among people sharing *pro* or *anti* communist feelings. In 2002, by way of a newly established tradition, the monument of the Soviet Army in Plovdiv was covered with swastikas.³⁹ Two years later, the central streets of Shumen were plastered overnight with glossy slogans “Never 9/9,” with the digit shaped into a blood stain.⁴⁰ Whereas celebrations of the day were taking place at Socialist Party clubs across the country,⁴¹ commemorations and counter rallies occupied the central streets and squares of larger Bulgarian towns. These events often brought together politicians from rival groups in Parliament, joined by common agendas to confirm or disclaim the validity of the 9th of September in the national calendar. The symbolic apparel of the events did not change substantially over the years: red flags and red roses or carnations for the socialists and those who celebrated; blue flags and national flags with black bands⁴² for those who commemorated. The slogans were more diverse, but generally the cries “Murderers!” and “Never again 9th of September!” were opposed by “Fascists!” and “Long Live Socialism!”⁴³

A new wave of disputes around the 9th of September occurred in 2004 when the Socialist Party organized a huge concert in the National Palace of Culture to celebrate the date’s sixtieth anniversary. The event was attended by more than 6,000 veterans and their grandchildren, and over 35,000 greeting telegrams to former antifascists and heroes of labor were signed personally by the leader of

Mikhailova, and the Bulgarian Agrarian National Union, Anastasia Moser, paid homage to the communist victims and appealed to all politicians to distance themselves from celebrations of dates and events leading to division and opposition in the society. See also the Act Declaring the Criminal Nature of the Communist Regime in Bulgaria, promulgated in *Dŭzhaven Vestnik* 37, 5 May 2000.

³⁸ For example, regular auctions of works by Bulgarian artists from the period of “mature” socialism, organized since 2002 in major hotels and art galleries in Sofia. *Trud* 249, 9 September 2002; 248, 9 September 2003.

³⁹ Although many socialists took part in a cleaning campaign before the celebration, the monument was left in this state to expose the vandalism of their opponents. *Trud* 250, 10 September 2002.

⁴⁰ The town’s mayor explained that “the 9th of September cannot be a national holiday” and appealed to the citizens to burn candles for the victims of the communist regime (*Trud* 251, 10 September 2004).

⁴¹ See various reports about local celebrations in smaller towns and villages. In the village of Selishte in the Pirin Mountain the tradition to celebrate the 9th of September was never discontinued.

⁴² Since 2005, this flag has been actively used by nationalist and radical right groups in addition to their own banners and symbols.

⁴³ The musical repertoire was also different: opposition songs and marches from the National Revival, on the one side, and socialist and Soviet songs on the other; *Vechnaya Pamyat* (Eternal memory) and Verdi’s *Requiem* versus *Mnogaya Leta* and *The International*.

the Socialist Party, Sergei Stanishev. During the concert, a protest rally outside the building gathered 3,000 opponents of the communist regime.⁴⁴ A procession from the National Palace of Culture was led by twenty priests with ropes around their necks as a sign of suppressed religious rights during the communist period. Public disagreement about the date's legitimacy continued in the following years and parliamentary debates about "the revival of totalitarianism through the new red-brown, communist-Nazi ideologies"⁴⁵ remained a persistent theme, but the controversial observances in 2004 were probably the last heated episode. The overall reevaluation of the socialist period under the triple coalition government⁴⁶ not only surrounded the 9th of September with a halo of rehabilitation and glory, but also relativized the date and instilled growing indifference. The growing part of the population whose formative years coincided with the transition period had hardly anything to associate the date with, and the public rallies and processions, despite their fervor, were doomed not to reach a point of agreement. The revisionist attempts at glorification could not overcome the increasing indifference in recent years as the ruptures about its significance progressively lost their power. In this context, the new call for reconciliation by the president in 2009 can be regarded as an attempt to refocus attention on the symbolic significance of the 9th of September and salvage it from the cloak of avoidance and neglect that threatened to accumulate with time.

Conclusion

Despite the various activities and semantic layers coalescing onto the 9th of September after the end of communism, its polarizing nature remained unchanged. Deeply grounded in the debate about Bulgarian fascism/antifascism that, despite all attempts, remained an open issue in Bulgarian historiography, the 9th of September is a glaring example of the difficulties of reconciling opposing visions about the past in present-day Bulgaria. Marking the introduction of communist rule in twentieth-century Bulgarian history, 9 September 1944 is one of the most challenging grounds for accommodating notions of "collective memory." Although the primary focus was on celebration of victory or commemoration of communist victims, divergent paths of remembrance went far beyond this. The changes of 1989 opened venues for articulating the observance

⁴⁴ This was the official information issued by the Ministry of Interior. According to the organizers' estimates, there were around 6,000 people.

⁴⁵ *Trud* 246, 10 September 2005.

⁴⁶ A coalition government between the Bulgarian Socialist Party, the National Movement Simeon II, and the Movement of Rights and Freedoms was elected in 2005 and stayed in power until the summer of 2009.

of this day from previously impossible paradigms, additionally sharpened by political and journalistic discourses, individual memories and government views on commemoration, specialist historical discourse (or the lack thereof), and the impact of social and cultural issues on public memory. All these factors diversified enormously the memory cultures about socialism and its foundational day, turning the memory about it into a splintered bricolage of disparate viewpoints and references.

Despite the rigorous dividing line of interpretation, the years after 1989 brought their important contributions, raising a range of questions about the pertinence of dates and special days as instances of interpreting the past. Whereas the major approaches toward the 9th of September in the early 1990s sought to redefine its significance in light of the crimes of the totalitarian regime, gradually its interpretation merged with the context of the transition period and the arising nostalgia for the socialist times, when it was a public holiday with great festivity. The danger of historical revisionism and of rewriting history in a way that will exonerate everyone from personal and group responsibility was paralleled by a critical loss of criteria to distinguish between communism and Nazism, and by a growing lack of awareness what to “celebrate” on this day and why. Often used as a vantage point for evaluating the communist period, the 9th of September was nonetheless affected by the processes of oblivion and (sometimes conscious) neglect, or the general lack of knowledge among young people who have hardly anything to associate it with. Various forums and online discussions about the 9th of September in recent years attest to the withering memory about the socialist period and the relativized meanings of whether this date is an appropriate occasion to celebrate or commemorate the past.

28. Remembering the “Revival Process” in Post-1989 Bulgaria

Evgenia Kalinova

The euphemistically called “revival process,” that is, the policy of the Bulgarian Communist Party aiming at ethnic assimilation of the Turkish minority in Bulgaria in the second half of the 1980s, has been in the scope of my research interests as an important part of contemporary Bulgarian history which I teach at the University of Sofia. At the same time, I have always been aware that the “revival process,” even though it ended in December 1989, is still present as a painful memory. When discussing the problem with my students, I observed that their reactions most often were purely emotional and only rarely based on concrete facts and knowledge. This is also valid for the public discourse about the “revival process.” What is more, I came to the conclusion that Bulgarian society is much more inclined to regard this process in the light of memories (especially those of the victims) and is much less interested in historical research on the subject. At the same time, during the transition period the “revival process” has been constantly used for political aims, albeit with varying intensity. These types of remembering and the uses of the “revival process,” which differ in motivation and in results, became a professional challenge for me as a historian and I decided to investigate them within the frames of the “Remembering Communism” project.

In 2005 a group of nineteen French historians signed a petition entitled “Liberté pour l’histoire.” They protested against the so-called *lois mémorielles*, intended to regulate the approach to, and the assessment of, certain historical events. The petition pointed out that history “is not identical with memory”; history “takes account of memory, but is not reduced to it” because historians “gather people’s memories, compare them, confront them with documents, objects, and traces and thus determine the facts.”¹ This approach should also guide historians when

¹ The petition was published in *Libération* on 13 December 2005 and on the website of the eponymous association: <http://www.lph-asso.fr/doc.html>. See commentary in Liliana Deyanova, “Polemikite za zakonodatelstvoto za ‘pametata’—‘mezhdusvobodata da mislish i zadilzhenieto da vi arvash,’” <http://www.bghelsinki.org/index.php?module=pages&lg=bg&page=obektiv14003>.

they place at the center of their research the memory of a certain event and not the event itself. The present paper aims at finding answers to questions typical of historical research: When, how, why and who remembers the so-called "revival process" carried out by the communist regime of Todor Zhivkov in the second half of the 1980s? In this period the Turkish-Arabic names of Bulgarian Turks were forcefully replaced with Bulgarian ones. The use of Turkish in public places was forbidden, as well as the performance of Muslim rituals and the wearing of clothes typical for the Turkish ethnic group.

From the very beginning of the transition to democracy, the remembrance of the "revival process" has strongly depended on the political situation. There are two distinct periods—from November 1989 until the parliamentary elections of 2001, and from 2001 until the elections of 2009. The key aspects to be analyzed in this chapter are the presence of the memory of the "revival process" in the media, published memoirs and cinema; the way political parties make use of the memory of the "revival process," including attempts at its judicial condemnation, commemoration meetings, honoring of the victims, and monuments; and the role of history as a discipline and especially the role of secondary and higher education in the process of remembering the "revival process."

During the first years of the transition period the memory of the "revival process" was used by political parties to support their agendas. Following 10 November 1989, the new reformist leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party (BCP) hoped to distance itself by blaming the event on the recently overthrown Zhivkov.² In order to survive politically, but also because of the danger of ethnic confrontation, the Central Committee of the BCP decided on its plenum on 29 December 1989 to restore the names of the Bulgarian Turks and condemned the "revival process" as a "campaign for the forceful creation of an ethnically monolithic Bulgarian nation."³ It also recognized that there were "violations of the constitutional rights of Bulgarian citizens" and that the "process" as a whole was a "major political mistake of the authoritarian regime of Todor Zhivkov." The mixed reactions of the public, however, quickly showed that the Communist Party, even under a new name—the Bulgarian Socialist Party (BSP), would not be able to take the lead in the reassessment of the "revival process" despite the arrests of Zhivkov and other top-rank officials on the accusation of "inciting national hatred." The BSP government headed by Andrei Lukanov took further measures to remedy the legal consequences of the "re-

² On the situation in Bulgaria at the end of 1989, see Evgenia Kalinova, "Trudnoto nachalo—otrichaneto ot 'vîzroditelniia protses' (10 noemvri 1989—ianuari 1990 g.)," in *Tolerantniiat natsionalist. Pameten sbornik za Staiko Trifonov*, ed. Iskra Baeva (Sofia: Paradigma, 2009), 343–65; Dimităr Ludzhev, *Revoliutsiata v Bilgariia, Vol. I.: "Nezhnata" 1989 i neinoto vreme* (Sofia: Dr. Ivan Bogorov, 2008), 253–55, 306–17.

³ The report of this plenum was published in *Ponedel'nik* 3–4 (1999): 93–111.

vival process.” A law was passed on 5 March 1990, which settled the procedure for restoring the Turkish names of the Bulgarian Turks, while a government decision from 1 August 1990 paved the way for returning real estate to those who had emigrated in 1989.⁴

Meanwhile, the newly created oppositional Union of Democratic Forces (UDF), which united anticommunist groups, and the Turkish-based Movement for Rights and Freedoms (MRF), called for a “new reading” of the recent past. UDF’s goal was to discredit its political adversary by demonstrating that the “revival process” was an inherent consequence of socialism, and therefore both should be condemned. For MRF’s leader Ahmed Dogan the “process” could be used as a reason for his party’s existence, as it proclaimed itself a defender of the rights and freedoms of the Turkish population in the country. The proximity of objectives against the common political adversary—the BSP—led to a common line of action between UDF and MRF from 1990 until the mid-1990s. During this period, the “revival process” was mostly remembered in terms of the guilt of the BCP/BSP as part of the condemnation of the repressive past. The prosecution of the former leadership for their decision to carry out the “revival process” was part of the electoral program of the UDF in the summer of 1990, which emphasized the repressions of the communist regime. This demand was strongly reiterated after June 1990, when the BSP won the first democratic elections and the UDF declared civil disobedience in protest to the results.⁵

The Lukanov government resigned at the end of 1990 and was succeeded by the coalition government of Dimităr Popov.⁶ The UDF and MRF again made demands to prosecute those responsible for the “revival process” and to address its consequences. In 1991 all repressed citizens in relation to the forced change of names were politically and civically vindicated. They were granted a one-time financial compensation and the heirs of people killed or disappeared during the “process” received a hereditary pension.⁷ The Armed Forces Prosecution started a judicial inquiry against Zhivkov and several former members of the Politburo and ministers: Georgi Atanasov, Dimităr Stoianov, Petăr Mladenov, and Pencho Kubadinski. They were charged with “inciting racial or national enmity” under article 162 of the Penal Code whereby they risked up to three years in prison.

⁴ The decision concerned property that had remained in the hands of the municipal authorities. See Valeri Stoianov, “Kîm rannata istoriia na DPS. Opit za biografichen ocherk,” in *Istoriata—profesiia i sîdba. Sbornik v chest na chlen correspondent Georgi Markov* (Sofia: Tangra TaNa-kRa, 2008), 644 and 650.

⁵ Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, *Bilgarskite prekhodi 1939–2005* (Sofia: Paradigma, 2006), 263, 266.

⁶ The coalition consisted of BSP, UDF, the Bulgarian Agrarian Union, and independent politicians.

⁷ Law for Political and Civil Rehabilitation of Repressed Persons, *Dirzhaven vestnik* 50 (1991), and 12 (2004).

The MRF initiated annual commemorations of events related to the "revival process." They took place outside the capital Sofia in the villages that retained the traumatic memory of the victims of the change of names (December 1984–January 1985) and the demonstrations of May 1989. The occasion was used to consolidate the MRF's electorate and to put pressure on the ruling parties at the time of heated public debates about the MRF's legitimacy and its right to participate in the October 1991 elections.⁸ Its leader, Dogan, presented himself as a safeguard against further aggressions against the Turkish ethnic community. In May 1991, during the annual commemoration of the "revival process" in the village of Kaolinovo, Dogan told 6,000 people that he would not allow this to happen ever again, or the MRF to be banned.⁹ Monuments were raised in the villages of the victims. The monuments and the annual commemorations kept alive the memory of the "revival process," as well as the close connection of the Bulgarian Turks with the MRF. These ceremonies were very rarely attended by members of other political parties. By far the most influential monument is Tyurkian Cheshma in the village of Mogiliane in the Rhodope Mountains. It was dedicated to the memory of an eighteen-month-old girl, Tyurkian Faizanova Hasanova, who died on 26 December 1984 during a demonstration against the change of names. Every year on this day the MRF organizes a commemoration meeting, attended, among others, by representatives of the emigrant organizations of Bulgarian Turks in Turkey. The memory of the innocent victim of the "revival process" is also maintained by a scholarship in her name. Similar monuments were raised in Momchilgrad, in the village of Mlechino in the Arda region, and elsewhere.

The story of a report containing information about the "revival process" from the archives of the Ministry of the Interior is of particular interest with regard to the manipulations of the official memory. On 27 January 1991, Popov's government decided to set up a committee for the investigation of the activity of the former State Security. In order to help its work, Minister of the Interior Khristo Danov appointed four subcommittees. Between 25 March and 30 April 1991 they investigated several important areas of State Security activities, and a central group was established to prepare the final report. Its 127 pages revealed the involvement of the State Security in the "revival process" with concrete figures about its repressive actions. The report disclosed the number of people whose names had been changed; the number of victims; and the number of people sent to the camp in Belene, expelled from the country in the

⁸ The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria of 12 July 1991 prohibits the existence of parties formed on an ethnic, racial, or religious basis (article 11, 4); nevertheless, a possibility was found to arrange for the MRF's participation in the parliamentary election. For details see Stoianov, "Kim rannata istoriia na DPS," 650–52.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 649.

middle of 1989, and tried and convicted for their resistance against the “revival process.” It also provided information about terrorist acts committed by Bulgarian Turks in the country during this period.¹⁰

The report was discussed at the Council of Ministers on 31 October 1991, when it was already clear that the winner of the 13 October parliamentary elections was the UDF. The withdrawal of the Popov government that had commissioned the report was only one of the reasons why the report received only brief deliberation and was then classified as “Top Secret! Copying strictly prohibited!” Most importantly, part of the conclusions of the report failed both the expectations of the outgoing government and those of the incoming one. In addition, Dimitir Ludzhev and Ivan Kostov, members of the investigating committee, retained their ministerial posts in the new UDF government.¹¹ Most probably the refusal to publish the report was related to those parts that dealt with the State Security connections with companies engaged in the so-called “hidden transit” of goods that were subject to special international control. Nonetheless, revelations about the “revival process” were also an important part of the reasons for the decision to keep it secret. First, the figures in the report differed from the general idea about the scale of the repressions (the public expected numerous victims, while the report identified the names of twenty). Second, even though the report was mainly critical, there was an evident desire to reveal the other side of the activities of the secret services—their struggle against terrorism and the defense of national security in the years of severe bloc confrontation, when Turkey and Bulgaria found themselves on different sides of the Iron Curtain. The decision of the cabinet not to publish the report was politically motivated, but it deprived the public of information about the “revival process,” which would have significantly influenced the collective memory of this event.

During the one-year rule of the UDF government headed by Filip Dimitrov (1991–1992), it collaborated with the MRF in demanding responsibility for the “revival process” and compensation for the victims. The two parties were united mostly in their desire to discredit their common political opponent, the BSP, and eradicate the legacy of the former regime. Thus, MRF provided parliamentary support for the UDF and supported its presidential candidate Zhelyu Zhelev.¹² The dividends paid off quickly. On 21 November 1991, in the space

¹⁰ Veselin Angelov, *Poveritelno! Komediata s dosietata (1989–2008)* (Sofia, 2008), 64–78.

¹¹ Dimitir Ludzhev was deputy chairman of the Council of Ministers in Dimitir Popov’s government and made the proposal for the establishment of the committee; Ivan Kostov was minister of finance. Kostov retained his post in Filip Dimitrov’s government, where Ludzhev took over the Ministry of Defense.

¹² The UDF had 110 seats in the National Assembly and the 24 MRF members provided parliamentary support without taking part in the government. At the opening session of the new parliament in November 1991 Dogan said that he would demand a ban against the BSP because it was responsible for the crisis. Baeva and Kalinova, *Bilgarskite prekhodi*, 282–84.

of two weeks since the UDF came to power, the new government introduced the optional study of Turkish as a "mother language" for four hours a week from the third to the eighth grade.¹³ In August 1992, the government passed a law (later known as the "Dogan Law"). It restored the real estate properties bought off by the state and the municipalities or by public organizations, to the Bulgarian Turks that had emigrated to Turkey between May and September 1989.¹⁴ The final conclusion of the Constitutional Court in April 1992 that the MRF was not based on ethnic or religious principles, and was therefore legitimate as it did not violate the Constitution, was a major victory for the party.

The fate of the secret 1991 Danov Report had important implications for the memory of the "revival process." The Dimitrov government made use of it only when it was to its advantage. Consequently, because of the attempt to energize Bulgarian-Turkish relations,¹⁵ it did not make public that part of the report, which revealed the activities of the Turkish secret services "toward destabilizing the internal situation and toward discrediting [Bulgaria] on the international stage."¹⁶ The collaboration with the MRF made it impossible to reveal the evidence in the report about "the terrorist acts committed by Bulgarian Turks, which were more common after the change of the names," or the information about the "successful infiltration of the Turkish special services on our territory and the use of the negative response of the Muslim population for destructive aims."¹⁷ Meanwhile, the strong desire to discredit the BSP rapidly and completely and to remove it from all positions of power prompted the government to use some "useful" parts of the report. This was done through parliamentary interpellation from the UDF MP Edvin Sugarev to the minister of the interior and the minister of defense concerning the "repressions against Bulgarians of Muslim religion and ethnic Turks in 1971–1972, 1984–1989, and 1989" and the involvement of the Bulgarian police and the army. Minister of the Interior Jordan Sokolov explained in details the mechanism by which the names of the Bulgarian Turks had been changed, the scale of the campaign, and the number of people prosecuted and convicted. The emphasis was put on the repressions

¹³ Stoianov, "Kîm rannata istoriia na DPS," 646–47, 655.

¹⁴ The law concerned only those Bulgarian Turks who permanently established their residence in Bulgaria before 1 March 1992. Act for Restoring Property Rights over Immovable Properties of Bulgarian Citizens of Turkish Origin Who Applied for Travel to the Republic of Turkey and Other States in May–September 1989, *Dirzhaven vestnik* 66, 14 August 1992.

¹⁵ For only six months in power the UDF government sealed important economic and military agreements, and in March 1992 Dimitîr Ludzhev became the first Bulgarian defense minister to visit Turkey after 1917. A good neighborhood, security, and cooperation agreement was signed in Ankara on 6 May 1992. Stoianov, "Kîm rannata istoriia na DPS," 655; Valeri Katzunov, Plamen Mitev, Valeri Kolev, Evgenia Kalinova, and Iskra Baeva, *Istoriia na Bilgariia po dati. Bilgarskata khronika* (Sofia: Trud, 2003), 419–20.

¹⁶ Angelov, *Poveritelno!*, 75–78.

¹⁷ Ibid., 74–75.

against opponents of the “revival process” and their resistance, but the terrorist acts carried out by a group of Bulgarian Turks were also mentioned. Sokolov mentioned six victims during the forced change of the names between 1984 and 1985; nine victims during the events of May 1989 in Northeast Bulgaria; and eight killed and fifty injured in terrorist acts. He also explained how the Ministry of the Interior sent 423 Bulgarian Turks in the Belene labor camp and expelled from the country 5,000 active participants in the May protests in 1989.¹⁸ He in fact repeated a shortened and revised version of the “top secret” Danov committee report of 1991. He cited accurately all figures, except the number of the victims—the report listed twenty names while Sokolov spoke of fifteen Bulgarian Turks killed. The minister also made it clear that all active participants in the “revival process” had been removed from the Ministry of the Interior.¹⁹ During the same parliamentary session, Minister of Defense Dimităr Ludzhev declared that there was “no evidence that the Bulgarian Army has participated in the repressive measures against civil population directly related to the change of names.”²⁰

Despite the publicly disclosed number of victims, Edvin Sugarev classified the “process” as “genocide against part of the Bulgarian people under the direct leadership of the BCP.”²¹ This represented the position of the authorities and set the direction of the public discourse. Sugarev also proposed that the Parliament should set up a special committee to investigate the “crimes of the BCP during the ‘revival process’”; the idea was met with applause by the UDF–MRF parliamentary groups, but was never implemented. The extensive media coverage of the facts presented in Parliament for the first time made the Bulgarian public aware of the mechanisms and the scale of the “revival process,” but in a form scripted by the governing parties. The UDF, however, failed to seize the opportunity to impose its and the MRF’s version of the “revival process” in history textbooks. In 1992 the cabinet replaced all previously existing textbooks with new ones, written against the clock by historians close to the party. The socialist period was altogether excluded from the new textbooks and the new high school curriculum. This was explained by the need for more time for serious research before including the period in the textbooks. This seemed a logical approach, but for the next five years Bulgarian students learned nothing of the recent past.

At the end of October 1992, Dimitrov’s government fell from power with a vote of no confidence supported by the MRF, which significantly cooled off relations between the two parties. The next government was formed by Prof.

¹⁸ See <http://www1.parliament.bg/kns/Pkontrol/36-IS-p/IS-p48.htm>.

¹⁹ This caused vehement but desultory parliamentary debate on the “revival process” on 31 January 1992: <http://www1.parliament.bg/kns/Pkontrol/36-IS-p/ras-1.htm>.

²⁰ See <http://www1.parliament.bg/kns/Pkontrol/36-DL-p/36-DL-p46.htm>.

²¹ See <http://www1.parliament.bg/kns/Pkontrol/36-IS-p/IS-p48.htm>.

Lyuben Berov with the MRF's mandate. Although with only one minister, this was the first time the MRF participated directly in the government. This allowed it to impose its own version of the "revival process" and to address its consequences. In 1993 the government passed a bill enabling all emigrants that had left the country after June 1989 to keep their Bulgarian citizenship even if they had acquired another one.²² In the same year Bulgarian National Radio started broadcasting news in Turkish in northeast Bulgaria and the Kirdzhali region, while starting in the 1994–1995 school year the optional study of Turkish was extended from the first to the eighth grade.²³

The inauguration by Dogan of the drinking fountain monument (*cheshma*) in the village of Trînak, Burgas district, was another important act for the preservation of the memory of the "revival process." One of the most controversial monuments, it is dedicated to three Bulgarian Turks whom Dogan called "fighters for rights and freedoms" but who were sentenced to death for several terrorist attacks killing eight innocent people, including children.²⁴ The names of the terrorists were written in Turkish and the MRF regional organization carried out *narodni sîbori* (people's gatherings) at this place. This demonstrated the desire to justify all opposition to the regime, disregarding the means. It also reflected the dominant atmosphere at the beginning of the transition and the urge to unequivocally condemn the period of state socialism contrary to historical facts and, in this particular case, moral norms.

When in the second half of the 1990s the MRF's political influence began to wane, it sought coalitions with different parties and a new rapprochement with the UDF cabinet of Ivan Kostov (1997–2001), but on the eve of the parliamentary elections of June 2001 their positions became irreconcilable.²⁵ This instability in the MRF's relations with Kostov's UDF led to a change in the way the "revival process" was remembered. A clear illustration was the dismantling of the monument in Trînak in 1998 following a decision of the prosecutor's office, but a year later it was restored. The media claimed that the restoration was the result of Dogan's warning that what happened in Bosnia would also happen in Bulgaria.²⁶

The memory of the "revival process" was not significantly influenced by the course of the trial against those responsible for it. In July 1993 the prosecutor's

²² In 1998 Prime Minister Ivan Kostov confirmed this before the emigrants in Bursa.

²³ Between November 1991 and 1994–1995 Turkish language classes were provided from third through eighth grade. Ibrahim İalîmov, *Istoriia na turskata obshtnost v Bîlgariia* (Sofia: IK Ilinda-Evtimov, 2002), 507–8.

²⁴ Emin Mehmedali (Elin Madzharov), Abdullah Çakır (Altsek Chakîrov), and Safet Recep (Sava Georgiev) were sentenced to death and executed in 1988. Emin's brother, Sabri Mehmedali, was sentenced to six years in prison as an accomplice. After 1989 he was released and was considered to have been "repressed." He later became the MRF district coordinator for Burgas.

²⁵ See further details in Baeva and Kalinova, *Bîlgarskite prekhodi*, 320–21, 329–31.

²⁶ Lyuben Obretenov, "Natsionalizîm na krainostite," *Sega Daily*, 14 March 2007, 6–7.

office brought to the Supreme Court an indictment against Zhivkov, Atanasov, and Stoianov.²⁷ However, there was an important change: the new indictment did not charge them with “inciting or preaching racial or national enmity or hatred or racial discrimination,” but with “abuse of power leading to important consequences.” In February 1995, the Supreme Court returned the case for further investigation and requested that all victims from 1984–1989 should be interrogated. This highlighted the main contradiction behind the case: while the indictment was against political leaders who carried out state policies and could hardly be convicted, the court took a different approach by seeking liability from the perpetrators of the crimes. Despite public expectations, the trial reached a dead end. In December 1997, under Kostov’s UDF government, the indictment was again brought to the Supreme Court, although the request to interrogate the significant number of people affected by the “process” was not carried out. Four months later, the Supreme Court returned the case for further investigation, noting that the 1995 requirements were not met.²⁸ Enormous work was needed to identify all people put in prison or sent to labor camps. The deaths of Zhivkov and Stoianov in 1998 and 1999 further diminished public interest in the case, which had already been running for ten years.

The late 1990s presented a new possibility to inform the young generation about the “revival process.” The BSP government (1995–1997) introduced a new high school curriculum in Bulgarian history covering the entire period after 1944. The Ministry of Education approved three history textbooks for the eleventh grade published in 1996. Two of them did not include any information about the “revival process.” The textbook published by the Open Society contained a lesson on national and ethnic problems with a broad section on the policies toward the Bulgarian Muslims between 1944 and 1989. This chapter was written by Professor Staiko Trifonov of Sofia University, one of the first researchers of the “revival process.”²⁹ Nobody noted the omission of the topic in the other two textbooks, but Trifonov’s text was subject to an interpellation in Parliament for inappropriate presentation of the clandestine organization TNODB (Turkish National Liberation Movement in Bulgaria), whose successor the MRF claimed to be. The UDF minister of education Vesselin Metodiev, a historian, even advised his university colleagues not to deal with historical events that occurred after their year of birth. He called for consultations between Bulgarian and Turkish authors writing history textbooks and claimed that “in three or four years all Balkan countries will have one common history text-

²⁷ In 1992 the case against the two other defendants, Petăr Mladenov and Pencho Kubadinski, was dropped for lack of evidence.

²⁸ <http://kei.parliament.bg/?page=ns&lng=bg&nsid=5&action=show&Type=cmSteno&SType=show&gid=169&id=638>.

²⁹ Petăr Angelov et al., *Istoriia na Bulgaria za 11 klas* (Sofia: Otvoreno obshtestvo, 1996), 497–99.

book, from which nationalism will be removed.”³⁰ Over a decade later this textbook is not simply missing; even the attempts at its compilation have been abandoned.

In the 1990s, the “revival process” became the subject of filmmakers. There were three documentaries, all directed by women: *Zaradi ednoto ime* (For just a name; 1990, dir. Maria Traianova), *Vizmozhni razstoianii* (Possible distances; 1992, dir. Iglia Trifonova), and *Izlishnite* (The unneeded ones; 1990, dir. Adela Peeva), as well as a TV miniseries in four episodes *Gori, gori oginche* (Burn, burn, little fire; 1994, screenplay by Malina Tomova, dir. Rumiana Petkova).

This was probably not a coincidence, as the topic was sensitive and all four works were forms of “traumatic catharsis.” They portrayed the sufferings of Bulgarian Muslims affected by the change of their names and eventually forced to emigrate. Despite the valuable documentary material, the first three films were noted mainly “by festival critics rather than by the general public,”³¹ and had very limited influence on the memory of the event. In contrast, the miniseries shown on national television had a significant impact. The movie dealt with events from the early 1960s, when an attempt to change the names of Bulgarian Muslims led to serious clashes in some villages (the film was set in the village of Ribnovo, Gotse Delchev region). The strong public response was predominantly negative. The film was viewed as a one-sided attempt to emphasize only the traumatic experience of those whose names were changed. The film producers were accused of presenting a simplistic dichotomy (victims–executioners). The reactions reflected also the controversial memories of different social groups about the events.

The different dimensions memorializing the “process” are further evidenced by the memoirs published in the 1990s. The first wave of published documents and memoirs, mostly by former high-ranking members of the BCP and the Ministry of the Interior, appeared in response to strong criticism about the role of the former ruling elites in the “revival process.” Publications focused on documents of the clandestine organization set up by the current MRF leader Dogan,³² as well as a number of memoirs blending personal recollections and documents.³³ Their authors tried to strengthen the case that they were defending

³⁰ *Sega Daily*, 11 April 1998; *Press Review*, 15 November 1999, <http://old.omda.bg/bulg/news/release/151199.htm>.

³¹ Genoveva Dimitrova, “Napravete film—lek za dushata,” *Kultura* 40, 31 October 2003, http://www.kultura.bg/media/my_html/2295/ochi.htm; “Choveshki drami prosilziavat v ‘Izlishnite,’” *Standard*, 14 January 2000; <http://bnf.bg/bg/odeon/movies/1051/>.

³² Paunka Gocheva, *DPS v sianka i svetlina* (Sofia: Impres, 1991).

³³ Georgi Sotirov, *Turskite teroristi i az, edin ot Shesto* (Sofia: IK “Mladezh,” 1991); Stoian Mikhailov, *Vizrozhdenskiat protses v Bilgariia* (Sofia: M&M, 1992); Orlin Zagorov, *Vizroditelniat protses. Teza-antiteza. Otritsanie na otritsaniето* (Sofia: IK “Ares,” 1993); Dimitir Stoitinov, *Zaplakhata. Velikodirzhavniat natsionalizim i razuznavaneto na Turtsiia protiv Bilgariia*

the integrity of state and nation, but their waning credibility rendered their version of the “revival process” less convincing and it failed to influence significantly the public assessment of the event. Much more influential were the memories of people who contested the BCP’s policies toward the Bulgarian Turks and tried to publicly express their views in 1989. They were, however, much shorter and were published in a single book in the general context of the Bulgarian dissident movement.³⁴ Clearly, even the opponents of the “revival process” were split over the dilemma between human rights and national interests.³⁵ Two years later these memories were complemented by a collection of State Security documents about the attitude of different dissident groups toward the “revival process.”³⁶

The 1990s also saw the beginning of scholarly research of the “revival process.” In contrast to the “stop-gap” rush over other facets of the socialist era, professional historians were more cautious in their approach to the topic. Eventually, two main methods emerged, depending on the choice of sources. The first was based upon the facilitated and—since 1993—unlimited access to the BCP archives, which allowed many historians to make important contributions with respect to the state policy toward the Bulgarian Muslims and Bulgarian–Turkish relations.³⁷ The second approach examined personal memories of the

(Sofia: Albatros, 1997); Boncho Asenov, *Vizroditelniat protses i Dırzhavna sigurnost* (Sofia, 1996); Veselin Bozhkov, *Zaplakhata ostava. Zapiski na kontrarazuznavach po turska liniia* (Sofia: Programni produkti i sistemi, 2001).

³⁴ See Evgenia Ivanova’s interviews with Ahmed Dogan, Georgi Mishev, Konstantin Trenchev, Nikolai Kolev-Bosia, Ilia Minev, Blaga Dimitrova, Koprinka Chervenкова, Antonina Zheliazkova, and Dimitır Ludzhev, among others. Evgenia Ivanova, *Bilgarskoto disidentstvo 1988–1989* (Sofia: Libri politices, 1997), 186–208.

³⁵ These diverging views were summed up by Mariana Zlateva: “The Turkish issues caused a rift between us. I had a fallout with Rumun Vodenicharov. I agreed that we should protect them. Yet organizing their hunger strike was not our job. Our job is to say: ‘Yes, they are people, too; they have their rights, too; and violating their rights is not right. But not to organize a hunger strike for them...’” (Ivanova, *Bilgarskoto disidentstvo*, 208).

³⁶ Stefan Doinov, ed., *Shesto upravlenie sreshtu neformalnite organizatsii v Bilgariia. Dokumentalen sbornik s materialı ot arkhivite na MVR i Tsentralnia dırzhaven arkhiv* (Sofia: Skorpion, 1999). Documents pertinent to the subject include doc. no. 28, 34, 35, 37–41. The volume was published by the foundation of the former president Zhelyu Zhelev.

³⁷ Among the first historians who professionally approached the subject based on extensive research material were Staiko Trifonov, Iordan Baev, Nikolai Kotev, Rumiana Todorova, and Valeri Stoianov. See Staiko Trifonov, “Strogo poveritelno!,” *Pogled* 16–20, 22 April–20 May 1991, 10; idem, “Myusyulmanite v politikata na bilgarskata dırzhava (1944–1989),” in *Stranitsi ot bilgarskata istoriia. Sibitiia, razmisli, lichnosti*, eds. Petır Angelov, Dimitır Tsanev, and Milcho Lalkov, part 2 (Sofia: Prosveta, 1993); Iordan Baev and Nikolai Kotev, “Izselniceskiiat vıpros v bilguaroturskite otnosheniia sled Vtorata svetovna voına,” 2 parts, *Mezhdunarodni otnosheniia* 1 (1994), 16–25; 2 (1994), 50–61; Rumiana Todorova, “Bilgaro-turski otnosheniia sled Vtorata svetovna voına (40-te–60-te godini),” *Istoricheski pregled* 5 (1994–1995); Valeri Stoianov, *Turskoto naselenie v Bilgariia mezhdı polıysite na etniceskata politika* (Sofia: Lik, 1998).

"revival process" through interviews with victims as part of oral history, a relatively new trend for the Bulgarian academic community.³⁸ These emotional interviews revealed the microhistory behind the "process" and the individual memory of the event. Notably, the Bulgarian Turks were interviewed more often, while the memories of Bulgarians were neglected.

Between 2001 and 2009 the remembrance of the "revival process" took place in a significantly changed political situation. The election success of a completely new party—the National Movement Simeon II (NMSS), visibly tempered the political confrontation between the BSP and the UDF, and in 2005 the BSP again entered the government. The most important factor was the increased political influence of the MRF. Dogan's party was well represented and played a substantial role in the governments of Simeon Saxecoburggotski (July 2001–August 2005) and Sergei Stanishev (August 2005–July 2009), which included for the first time a coalition between the BSP and the MRF together with the NMSS. Another important development (to a certain extent a counterweight to the increasing influence of the MRF) was the establishment of Ataka, a new political party headed by Volen Siderov. It presented itself as a nationalistic organization that led an active anti-MRF and anti-Turkish propaganda campaign,³⁹ which was embraced by smaller groups, such as the OKZNI (People's Committee for the Protection of National Interest), VMRO (Inner Macedonian Revolutionary Organization), and Boian Rasate's Bulgarian National Union. This new constellation of political forces led to changes in the public rhetoric about the "revival process."

A few months before the parliamentary elections in 2001, a documentary provoked heated debates. It was shown on 5 January in the Cinema House in Sofia in the presence of Prime Minister Kostov, other government ministers, and former Bulgarian president Zhelyu Zhelev. Four days later, the film was broadcast in prime time on national television. It was directed by Radio Free Europe journalist Tatiana Vaksberg and was revealingly named *Tekhnologiia na zloto* (The technology of evil). Neither the previous three documentaries, nor the two new films on Kîrdzhali and Ribново made in 2001, enjoyed such presentation.⁴⁰ Vaksberg's film took a genuinely different, more persuasive approach: in addition to the emotional accounts of ordinary people about the change of their names, it was based on a number of documents from the ar-

³⁸ See articles by Ivanichka Georgieva, Tsvetana Georgieva, Antonina Zheliazkova, Donka Dimitrova, and others in two collective publications: *Etnicheskata kartina v Bilgariia (Prouchvania 1992 g.)* (Sofia: Klub'90, 1993); and Antonina Zheliazkova, ed., *Mezhdû adaptatsiata i nostalgia. Bilgarskite turtsi v Turtsiia* (Sofia: IMIR, 1998).

³⁹ Ataka emerged from its first parliamentary election in 2005 with 8.9% of the vote followed by 9.36% in 2009.

⁴⁰ *Kîrdzhali—litsa ot peizazha* (dir. Antonii Donchev) and *Zhivot v Ribново* (dir. Maria Traianova).

chives of the former BCP. In contrast to the previous attempts, it claimed to investigate not only individual stories, but also the entire “technology” of the “process.” Despite the expectations raised by this approach, the film did not seek the motives behind the event. Its main idea was to present the BCP as “immemorial evil.” It did not mention the resistance by Bulgarians and Turks: a direct attack against one of the MRF’s founding claims of being the successor to the TNODB, which had fought against Zhivkov’s regime under Dogan’s leadership.⁴¹ The message, the timing, and the film’s promotion contributed to its more significant influence in comparison to all other cinematic productions. Politicians immediately picked up the debate. Dogan directly accused the governing UDF of having turned the “revival process” into a “political card that aimed most probably to put a dent in any future relations between the MRF and the BSP.”⁴² The tone got sharper and Dogan began talking of the “process” as a form of genocide; he claimed that not only one party was responsible for it, but the whole state apparatus and even “part of the public, because nobody stood up against it.” Kostov also gave a definition: “this was assimilation followed by deportation,” but not genocide, and the deportation “was not like that of the Jews.”⁴³

The film also provoked a sharp reaction from former dissidents who had protested against the “revival process.” For them, the “process” remained a “despicable operation of the communist rule, a display of state terrorism” (Petko Simeonov),⁴⁴ “an outrage” (Koprinka Chervenкова),⁴⁵ but they disagreed that the resistance of the Turks and of supportive Bulgarians should be effaced from memory. They insisted that the moving confessions of the victims should not be used for political aims.

The reaction of Bulgarians in Kîrdzhali demonstrated the divergence between the film’s message and their own memories. They were offended by the way their emotions during the “revival process” had been neglected by the film director: “The film did not show the compassion, the attitude of neighbors and colleagues. I remember that 99% of us were shocked,” a Bulgarian woman re-

⁴¹ Ibrahim Tatarlı, *Dvizhenieto za prava i svobodi—obshtonatsionalna partiia, faktor za demokratsiata v stranata* (Sofia, 1997).

⁴² Interview with Dogan, 8 January 2001, <http://www.mediapool.bg/site/bulgaria/2001/01/11/0001.shtml>.

⁴³ Interview with Ivan Kostov after the official presentation of the documentary. See <http://www.mediapool.bg/site/bulgaria/2001/01/11/0001.shtml>; “Pak za t. nar. vizroditelen protses. Po povod na filma na Tatiana Vaksberg ‘Tekhnologija na zloto,’” *Trud*, 10 January 2001, 9.

⁴⁴ Petko Simeonov, “Tekhnologija na dobroto,” http://omda.bg/bulg/news/release/08_14_01_01.html.

⁴⁵ Koprinka Chervenкова, “Kolko izliga Tatiana Vaksberg v proizvedenieto si, narecheno ‘Tekhnologija na zloto?’,” *Kultura*, 12 January 2001, <http://www.kultura.bg/bg/article/view/4921>.

called. According to her, the explanation was clear and the film was custom-made for political reasons "right now, when the MRF was on the way to form a coalition with the BSP."⁴⁶ The Bulgarian Turks were divided. Part of them, mainly Dogan's supporters, agreed with his assessment that the film was a preelection propaganda tool ordered by the governing UDF in order to discredit and isolate the MRF. Others, however, denied that the film served UDF interests and were grateful to its creators, because "everybody will learn what we have lived through and how we have survived."⁴⁷

The interview of the popular singer Yıldız Ibrahimova, published in the course of the debates, managed to strike a balance. A member of the intelligentsia that Vaksberg "failed" to present, she talked not only of the pain caused by the change of her name, but also of the help she received from Bulgarians.⁴⁸ In the following years, filmmakers continued to explore the viewpoints of both Bulgarians and Turks. This trend can be seen in the next two films on the "revival process": the documentary *Pitiat* (The road) and the feature film *Otkradnati ochi* (Stolen eyes), both released in 2003 and produced by "mixed" crews (again mostly women). The documentary traced the fate of the Bulgarian Turks who left Bulgaria in 1989 (director: Stanislava Kalcheva, script: Petia Teteven-ska and Stefka Kaleva, consultant: the journalist Nihal Yozergan). *Stolen Eyes* was directed by Radoslav Spasov, who wrote the script in collaboration with Neri Terzieva, a well-known TV journalist of Turkish origin. The film was the first coproduction between Bulgaria and Turkey on the topic. Its creators and the producers were convinced that both Turks and Bulgarians were victims of the "revival process," as well as that "the wounds and the personal drama of hundreds of thousands people need time to heal, but honor obliges us to talk about everything that happened, even if it was ugly, humiliating, and terrible."⁴⁹ They emphasized that the script was written "from the point of view of both ethnic groups" and suggested tolerance and humanity in the perception of the main characters and events. Vesela Kazakova, who was cast as the main character, said: "The whole crew assumed an incredible responsibility with this film—there are living witnesses, everything was touched carefully, as if with cotton, in order not to make mistakes."⁵⁰

The European institutions appreciated this approach and the film received financing from EUROIMAGE (a coproduction support fund with the Council of

⁴⁶ Vildan Bairiamova, "Dukhovete v Kirdzhali razbuneni ot 'Tekhnologiiia na zloto,'" *Sega*, 11 January 2001, <http://www.segabg.com/article.php?id=165613>.

⁴⁷ Ibid.; İlhan Andai, "Sîlzi i smiakh v Kîrdzhali, gledat filma na Vaksberg," *24 chasa*, 14 January 2001, 3.

⁴⁸ Interview with Yıldız Ibrahimova, 11 January 2001, <http://www.mediapool.bg/site/bulgaria/2001/01/11/0001.shtml>.

⁴⁹ Dimitrova, "Napravete film—lek za dushata."

⁵⁰ Ibid.

Europe). Meanwhile, in Bulgaria the film had to face suspicion and rejection even before it had reached the public. Its creators were warned that the wounds inflicted by the “revival process” on society had not yet healed and that, just like *Burn, Burn, Little Fire* and *The Technology of Evil*, the film “will further cause pain for a number of Bulgarian citizens” and will harm the “incipient reconciliation process.”⁵¹ The public did not approve of the “revival process,” but feared that it was again going to be used for political purposes. The release of the film in the autumn of 2005 dispersed these fears and the love story pleased the sparse audience. Negative reviews criticized only artistic flaws.⁵² In the following eighteen months, the film participated in an impressive number of international festivals and received numerous awards.

This illustrated how hard it is to determine to what extent the disapproval of works of art on this sensitive topic arose from the wish to have a more balanced representation or from the desire to simply avoid public scandal. Both motivations can be found in the refusal of the director of the Ivan Vazov National Theater, Prof. Vasil Stefanov, to stage Teodora Dimova’s play *Nevidimite pîtishta na proshkata* (The invisible paths of forgiveness) at the end of 2004. Dimova openly admitted that her work spoke of the “humiliation and the wounds inflicted on the Bulgarian Turks,” while the director stated that in the year of the theater’s centenary, it was “not appropriate to stage a play dealing with political issues.”⁵³ Besides, the play would be inappropriately juxtaposed to the staging of Ivan Vazov’s nineteenth-century canonical play *Hîshove*, commemorating the liberation struggle of Bulgarians against Ottoman domination. This episode highlighted an important change in the way the “revival process” was remembered. After more than a decade during which the traumas of the Bulgarian Muslims were emphasized, now the memory and the emotions of ethnic Bulgarians were also taken into account. It may appear incomprehensible that this “broader perspective” occurred when the MRF was part of the government. The criticism toward its behavior as a ruling party led to a critical attitude toward its version of the “revival process” and provoked the search for different points of view. More information about the events became available. The rising nationalist discourse used the “revival process” to politically legitimize parties such as Ataka, OKZNI, the Fatherland Party, and VMRO.

While in government (2001–2009), the MRF was in a better position to assert its own version of the “revival process.” It used the traditional emotional commemorations at the “places of memory” honoring the suffering of the vic-

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ianko Terziev, “Ochi razlichni, oshte tîzhni,” *Kapital*, 17 September 2005, http://www.capital.bg/vestnikut/kapital_light/subitiiia/2005/09/17/6724_ochi_razlichni_oshte_tujni/.

⁵³ Dejan Enev, “Stava li teatîr ot vîzroditelniia proces,” *Sega*, 4 November 2004, <http://www.segabg.com/article.php?issueid=1339§ionid=8&id=00001>.

tims to emphasize the leading role of the MRF and its leader in the resistance against the BCP in the past and in protecting the interests of the Bulgarian Muslims in the present. In the new political context Dogan presented his party as a nonethnic organization (by appointing ethnic Bulgarians to important positions). He appeared less often at the commemorations and the attending MRF ministers began to restrain their comments about the "revival process." Two other factors further shaped this new moderate course: the disclosure of the files of the former communist secret services, which showed that prominent MRF figures had been affiliated with their activities (including Dogan), and the desire of the Bulgarian Muslims attending the commemorative events to hear more about the solutions proposed by the MRF to their current problems.

At times, the "revival process" was used as an outright provocation. In March 2003, at a commemoration rally in the village of Kornitsa for the victims of the renaming campaign in 1973, the deputy regional governor of Pazardzhik, Redzheb Mollah Ahmed, gave an emotional speech.⁵⁴ He claimed that the "revival process" was still going on full speed" in the Rhodope region and the "sad results" could be seen in the 2001 census, according to which over the past decade the Bulgarian Turks had decreased by 55,000 people.⁵⁵ He also called for all school subjects to be studied in Turkish: "They tell us that according to the Constitution, Bulgarian is the official language. For us, Turkish is the official language." Finally, he urged for Christians to be driven away from the Rhodope region.⁵⁶ On the following day Dogan told the media that this was not the official political agenda of the MRF and these words were an "error." The three MRF MPs who attended the rally remained silent. At a commemoration rally in the village of Pristoe in May 2008, another MP, Ahmed Hussein, called for the construction of a "monument of shame." Again, the MRF deputy chairman of the National Assembly Yunal Lyutfi remained silent at the rally, but on the next day claimed that this was only his colleague's "personal opinion" and that he took the idea from similar monuments in other countries.⁵⁷

Clearly, the MRF was politically motivated to evaluate the "revival process" differently in front of different audiences. Telling is the MRF's position at the trial about the "revival process." When it returned to the Prosecutor's Office in

⁵⁴ Evgenia Ivanova, "Ogledalnite obrazi na drugostta," http://www.online.bg/kultura/my_html/2270/other.htm; Svetlana Vasileva, "DPS upravnik: v lapite sme na vîzroditelniia prozes," *Trud*, March 2003, 4.

⁵⁵ According to the census in 1992, Bulgarian Turks numbered 800,052, or 9.44% of the total population. In 2001 they totalled 745,000, or 9.3% (Baeva and Kalinova, *Bîlgarskite prekhodi*, 411).

⁵⁶ Toni Maskrichka, "Khristiianite vîn ot Rodopite," *24 chasa*, March 2003, 2.

⁵⁷ Mustafa Mustafov, "Iunal Liutfi—zam.-predsedatel na Narodnoto sîbranie i deputat ot DPS: Dokladit na EK shte bîde preduprezhdenie kîm pravitelstvoto da zapretne rikavi," <http://www.topnews.name/news-inside.php?id=4114>.

1998, it was clear that no one in the former BCP leadership would be convicted, since most of the main participants were already dead (except Atanasov). The public had lost interest and the trial ceased to influence the memory of the "revival process." The Prosecutor's Office took into consideration the advice of the Supreme Court to identify those responsible for particular crimes and attempted to contact and interrogate as witnesses 446 victims from the period between 1984 and 1989.⁵⁸ However, 134 of the identified victims were in Turkey. Bulgaria made official steps for their summoning and interrogation in front of the Turkish court, but only the third attempt in the autumn of 2006 produced an incomplete reply concerning only a limited number of people.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, four people were convicted of murder and other four trials were under way concerning the death of six Bulgarian citizens during the "revival process."⁶⁰

The results did not receive much media publicity. This allowed the MRF to regularly step up the propaganda, emphasizing that no politicians were convicted, especially on the eve of elections. Meanwhile, it continued to search for other ways to condemn the "revival process." In 2003, at the movement's Seventh Conference, a proposal was made to take the case to the International Tribunal in The Hague.⁶¹ No action was taken, but this gave ground for accusations against the MRF that it wanted to discredit Bulgaria. In January 2006 the MRF presented its version of the "revival process" in front of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE). The move took advantage of the discussions on a PACE resolution condemning the crimes of communist regimes in Europe. The head of the Bulgarian delegation Yunal Lyutfi remarked that as a witness who had personally lived through the tragedy of his ethnos, he was surprised that the PACE report contained no explicit mention of the "revival process." Lyutfi described it as "the politics of ethno-genocide" and "a flagrant crime."⁶² His statement was taken into consideration, especially since minority rights are one of the Council of Europe's priorities. In the middle of 2006, Hannah Severinsen, deputy director of the PACE Monitoring Committee, visited Bulgaria and concluded that the country had "serious problems" in this area. At the beginning of 2007 the parliamentary Committee on Human Rights and Religions adopted an official position on her report, listing what has been done to overcome the consequences of the "revival process" and rejecting her definition of the events as genocide. During the debates, representatives of the UDF and the Democrats for a Strong Bulgaria (DSB, a group headed by former UDF

⁵⁸ Petar Danev, "DPS pak iska sîd za vîzroditelniia protses," *Sega*, 3 July 2003, 4.

⁵⁹ See <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=ns&lng=bg&nnsid>.

⁶⁰ See <http://www.prb.bg/php/newspage.php?news=109>.

⁶¹ Ahmed Hussein interviewed by Maia Stoianova, "Nakazanie za magistratite, provalili deloto za Vizroditelniia protses," http://frognews.bg/Frog/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=6913&Itemid=294.

⁶² See <http://www.parliament.bg/?page=news&lng=bg&SType=show&id=759>.

leader Kostov) pressed for this definition to remain, but the MRF representative Ahmed Hussein was against it. In defending his position, he shared his personal memories:

I personally understand "genocide" in this way—one regime starts to destroy, to kill people, to exterminate them altogether. But there was no such thing in Bulgaria. I cannot allow myself to vote as a witness of these events—people were killed, but there was no widespread extermination in the neighborhoods. That's how I understand this word.⁶³

Bulgaria's pending accession to the EU and the ineffectual court trial about the "revival process" stirred up some groups of Bulgarian Turks that had emigrated to Turkey. In 2001 the Balkanlalar Association of the Repressed Balkan Turks sent a complaint for refusal of justice against Bulgaria to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg, emphasizing that no Bulgarian statesmen were convicted for the "revival process." Two years later, 147 Bulgarian Turks that had emigrated to Turkey and had become members of the Association for Justice and Cultural Rights in the Balkans sent another complaint, describing their suffering. According to the chairman of the association, their goal was to receive "compensation for the deep wounds inflicted by this assimilation."⁶⁴ In April 2005 the Court in Strasbourg rejected their complaint on the grounds that at the time of the "revival process" the Convention on Human Rights was not valid in Bulgaria (it was ratified by Bulgaria in 1992). The Justice National Center, an NGO created in 2006 by Sezgin Myumyun to unite the repressed Bulgarian Turks, also lobbied the European institutions for compensations. Both emigrant organizations and the MRF relied on the authority of European institutions in order to legitimize their own versions of the memory of the "revival process," but they took distinctly different approaches. Trying to portray itself as a nonethnic political party, the MRF put the "revival process" in the more general context of anticommunist resistance. The emigrant organizations and the formations of Bulgarian Turks outside the MRF looked at the event strictly as a violation of human rights of the ethnic group. However, the recourse to European institutions and the lack of concrete results did not allow these initiatives to influence the collective memory of the "revival process."

After 2001, the attempt to emphasize the heroic resistance of their organizations, overshadowed the topic of victimhood. In 2003, the official history of the party and a collection of documents, titled *The Truth about the "Revival Process,"* were simultaneously published.⁶⁵ The discourse presenting Dogan as the

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ See <http://www.mediapool.bg/show/?storyid=104376&p=11>.

⁶⁵ Ibrahim Tatarlı, *Dvizhenieto za prava i svobodi—faktor za demokratsiia, razbiratelstvo i sigurnost v stranata i na Balkanite* (Sofia, 2003); Samuel Levi, *Istinata za "Vizroditelniia protses."* *Dokumenti ot arkhiva na Politbiuro i TSK na BKP* (Sofia: Institut za izsledvane na integratsiata, 2003).

leading figure in the resistance against the “revival process” was disputed by the MRF splinter groups and by newly created organizations of Bulgarian Turks. One of the first to speak up was Gyuner Tahir, leader of the National Movement for Rights and Freedoms (NMRF) established at the end of 1998 and supporting Kostov in his struggle against Dogan. Osman Oktay and Sezgin Myumyun, former Dogan associates who had split apart from the MRF, accused him in the media of direct participation in the “revival process.” Mustafa Yumer and Sabri Iskender, the leaders of the clandestine Democratic League of the Turks in Bulgaria, created at the end of 1988, presented their version of the leading role of their organization in the May 1989 protests.⁶⁶ Dogan’s response was thorough and impressive: two volumes with documents from the archives of the BCP and the Ministry of the Interior were published, attempting to stress the role of Dogan in the opposition of the Bulgarian Turks.⁶⁷

Between 2001 and 2009, the narrative of the repressions during the “revival process” was continuously expanded with publications of memoirs in the press and collections of interviews and documents.⁶⁸ A new trend appeared—presenting subjectivities other than the exclusive emphasis on trauma. Hasine Shen from Kirdzhali described her departure for Turkey in the summer of 1989 as a watershed shaping her new philosophy and identity:

I felt fate has decided that I should inhabit an intermediate territory, in constant motion between two countries, two cultures, two languages, two religions ... as soon as we crossed the border. As early as Kapikule the notions of “here” and “there” merged through the two lines of people moving in opposite directions. We were going “there,” in Turkey, with open fear of the unknown, while they were coming back, disappointed, tired, and slightly ashamed.... Some among us were crossing the border for a second time. They had once come back to Bulgaria after the disappointing “tour,” and were now heading again to the other country. Very soon after I crossed the line I understood their mad wandering. I discovered it best corresponds to the state of mind of a person who has been forced to leave and to never be able to return.⁶⁹

Others added to the memory of the repressions the “heretical” comparison between their lives before and after the beginning of the transition:

⁶⁶ Azis Bey, *Demokratichnata liga na turtsite v Bilgariia* (Sofia, 2004).

⁶⁷ Veselin Angelov, *Strogo poveritelno! Asimilatorskata kampaniia sreshtu turskoto natsionalno maltsinstvo v Bilgariia 1984–1989* (Sofia, 2008); idem, *Sekretno! Protestnite aksii na turtsite v Bilgariia ianuari-mai 1989* (Sofia, 2009).

⁶⁸ Vildan Bairiamova, “Istoriata, vizroditelniat protses, goliamata ekskurziia,” www.segabg.com/online/article.asp?issueid=901§ionid=5&id=00007; Ali Adikov and Senem Konedareva eds., *Gorchivi razkazi* (Blagoevgrad: Fondatsia za regionalno razvitie “Rodopi XXI vek,” 2003); Liliana Aleksandrieva, ed., *Niakoga, v 89-a. (Intervyuta na zhurnalistkata ot Radio Svobodna Evropa Rumiana Uzunova)* (Sofia: Fondatsia “Dr. Zhelyu Zhelev,” 2007).

⁶⁹ See www.segabg.com/online/article.asp?issueid=901§ionid=5&id=00007.

Until the 1990s I worked in the TKZS in a cattle-breeding brigade. Ardino had one of the most beautiful farms. Everybody who came to see it was filled with pleasure. But with the beginning of this democracy, that's how we call it, they started to neglect us. Before, even under communism, they thought about the inhabitants of the Rhodopes— they gave us money on top of our salaries with the sole purpose to keep the people.⁷⁰

The different attitude and memory of some Bulgarian Turks about the "revival process" can also be seen in their refusal to even talk about it: "I do not want to take sides on the so-called "revival" question. I am above such things, I am mature and wise enough."⁷¹ The account of Katia Pavlova (who did not wish to restore her birth name Raime Mehmedova) from the village of Chernoochene, Kîrdzhali region, was in stark contrast with the memories of the majority of Bulgarian Turks. For her, the "process" was the beginning of her romance with the policeman who came to change the names of her family, but this led to a dramatic conflict with her family.⁷² The story calls to mind the plot of the movie *Stolen Eyes* but with a happy ending.

The publication of memoirs of ethnic Bulgarians, although rare, also diversified the process of remembering the "revival process." Generally, they were written by young people, possibly because they could not be held accountable for their position and reactions.⁷³ The dominant topic in these mostly childhood memories is the process of becoming aware of the "difference" of those whose names were changed. In rare cases, witnesses or victims of terrorist acts also shared their memories.⁷⁴ The few memoirs published by ex-employees of the Ministry of the Interior, secret services personnel, and former Communist Party functionaries were a priori considered to be untrustworthy attempts to justify the actions of their authors. Their version of the "revival process" emphasized the threats to national security and included information about the role of the Turkish secret services in Bulgaria—a taboo and strongly repressed topic in the memories of the victims. In order to render their position more authentic, these authors often provided documents from the archives of the Ministry of the Inte-

⁷⁰ Fikret Terziev interviewed by Antonina Zheliazkova, Ardino, 8 April 2006, in Antonina Zheliazkova, ed., *Istoriyata, naselena s khora. Bilgarskoto obshtestvo prez vtorata polovina na XX vek, Vol. II: Intervyuta, svidetelstva, spomeni* (Sofia: Gutenberg, 2006), 708–19.

⁷¹ Yuksel Ahmedov Chaushev interviewed by Tsena Vicheva, Razgrad, April 2006, in *ibid.*, 733.

⁷² Vanio Stoilov, "Katia Pavlova, rodена Raime: 110 kilometra vsiaka vecher ot lyubov," *24 chasa*, 3 March 2009, 10–11.

⁷³ See, for example, the memories collected online and published in Georgi Gospodinov, ed., *Az zhiviakh sotsializma. 171 personal stories* (Plovdiv: Janet-45, 2006), 161, 164–65, 167–68.

⁷⁴ Interview with Ivan Bozhkov, a witness of the terrorist act committed on 9 March 1985 at the Bunovo railway station by three Bulgarian Turks, *Ataka*, 12 March 2007, http://www.vestnikataka.com/?module=displaystory&story_id=28156&edition_id=444&format=html; interview with Darin Todorov, one of two children taken hostage by three Bulgarian Turks on 8 July 1987 in the Black Sea resort Zlatni Piasitsi in protest against the change of their names and with the aim to flee to Turkey, *24 chasa*, 26 and 27 June 2007, 10–11.

rior, but rarely provided complete references.⁷⁵ This peculiar hybrid between memoir and documentary did not give a clear account of the authors' experiences and did not significantly influence the collective memory of the "revival process."

The media also tried to present a wider range of problems. The interest focused on the emigration in the summer of 1989, the activity of the Turkish intelligence services, and the terrorist acts. Journalists based their stories on archival documents and interviews with former Ministry of the Interior personnel.⁷⁶ Such publications in some of the most popular national newspapers undoubtedly influenced the memory of the "revival process" and balanced publications from the previous period that had focused mainly on its violent character and presented only the version of the Turkish population. The journalists were also among the first who demanded that the victims of the "revival process" should not be differentiated, with some being remembered, while others were neglected. The media noted that while commemoration meetings in memory of the Bulgarian Turks were held since the beginning of the transition, the victims of terrorist acts were nearly forgotten until 2005; they underscored that "history needs to be remembered as a whole, not only in separate fragments."⁷⁷

A new topic was gradually emerging: since Bulgaria had paid compensation to those repressed during the "revival process," Turkey had to fulfill its long-standing commitment from 1925, to compensate the Bulgarians who were driven away from Eastern Thrace in 1913.⁷⁸ The topic was far broader than the financial considerations involved. In 2003, historians accused the Bulgarian MPs of lacking of courage and having short memories for not commemorating the victims of the "Thracian genocide" and for not demanding that "the Turkish government apologize to the Bulgarian people for what its predecessors did in

⁷⁵ Bozhkov, *Zaplakhata ostava*; idem, *Zaplakhata nastipva. Zapiski na kontrarazuznavach po turska linia* (Sofia: Propeler, 2006); Vassil Zikulov, *Voennoto razuznavane na Bilgariia i Studenata voina* (Sofia: IK "Khristo Botev," 2005); Dimitir Vandov, *Razuznavane po glavnoto napravlenie* (Sofia: Dona, 2007); Petir Stoianov, *Shesto upravlenie: moiata istina*, vol. 2 (Sofia: IK "Daniela Ubenova-Sofi," 2008).

⁷⁶ Dimitir Statkov, "Goliamata ekskurziia," *Trud*, 29 May 2003, 9; Ventsi Venkov, "Razmeniiat Fuat s agent na KGB," *24 chasa*, 10 July 2003, 6–7; idem, "Maika Turtsiia plashta po 180 lv. na svoia nai-sposoben agent," *24 chasa*, 14 July 2003, 6; Dessi Dencheva, "7 bilgarski turtsi osideni za neosishtestven teroristichen akt," *Sega*, 2 and 9 July 2005, 4; Diana Dimitrova and Ventsi Venkov, "Otvlichaneto—20 godini po-kisno," *24 chasa*, 26, 27 and 28 June 2007, 6–7.

⁷⁷ Lyuba Manolova, "Da pochetem bilgarite-khristiiani, zaginali vlv 'vizroditelniia protses,'" *Monitor*, 31 May 2004, <http://www.monitor.bg/article?id=1389>; Lyuben Obretenov, "Dogan, Tiurkiiian i poukite ot vizroditelniia protses," *Sega*, 28 December 2005, <http://www.segabg.com/article.php?sid=2005122900040001301>.

⁷⁸ In May 2008 the European Parliament included in its report about Turkey's progress toward accession to the EU the recommendation to settle the problem of the compensation of the Bulgarian refugees from Eastern Trace. See *Trud*, 22 May 2008, 2; *Standard*, 22 May 2008, 3.

1913 just like our government has done for the 'revival process' a number of times since 1989."⁷⁹

Another distinctive trait of the period 2001–2009 was the active participation of nationalist organizations in the process of remembering the "revival process." These included organizations that have existed since the beginning of the transition, such as OKZNI and VMRO, as well as new players, such as the Bulgarian National Union of Rasate (2001) and the political party Ataka (2005). An analysis of Bulgarian nationalism is outside the scope of this paper, but these organizations generally focused on the victims of terrorist acts and Turkey's attitude toward the Bulgarian Turks. Leading among them is Ataka, which has its own newspaper and TV channel and is represented in Parliament. They often draw emotional parallels with the victims of the April Uprising of 1876, with the forced conversion to Islam in the Ottoman Empire, and with the tragic fate of the Bulgarians from Eastern Thrace in 1913.

At the same time these parties do give a negative assessment of the "revival process" and define it as "public repression against the Muslim population" and "political blasphemy."⁸⁰ The rhetoric of Ataka, OKZNI, and VMRO also includes calls for the MRF to apologize for the terrorist acts carried out during the "revival process," and for Turkey to apologize for the "Thracian genocide" of 1913.⁸¹ Their actions led to one minute of silence in the National Assembly to commemorate the seven victims (including two children) of the terrorist attack at the Bunovo railway station on 9 March 1985, to the organization of commemoration rallies there, and the construction in 2007 of an impressive monument.⁸² These rallies, however, were not attended by representatives of the governing BSP and the NMSS, due to the sensitive nature of the topic for their third coalition partner, the MRF.

The nationalistic parties regularly use the "revival process" to get more publicity. Ataka's attitude toward the movie *Stolen Eyes* is a good example. When

⁷⁹ Bozhidar Dimitrov, "Trakiiskiiat genotsid i vizroditelniat protses," *Trud*, 8 July 2003, 2. During their official visits to Turkey Prime Minister Ivan Kostov and President Petăr Stoiانov presented excuses for the "revival process" before Bulgarian Turks that had emigrated in Turkey. In 2002 Vice President Angel Marin asked for forgiveness before a meeting commemorating the victims of the "revival process" in the village of Barutin, stating that "injustice was committed against you in my country." He added: "I don't want any new Batak massacres and any new revival processes in my country" (<http://president.bol.bg/news.php?id=94&st=40>).

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Volen Siderov, "Trakiiskiiat genotsid," *Ataka*, 19 October 2005, 2; "Iskat Dogan da se izvini za atentati," *24 chasa*, 9 March 2006.

⁸² From the early 1990s a modest plaque on the building of the Bunovo railway station reminds of the terrorist act of March 1985 and its victims. In 2006 the Fatherland Party, OKZNI, and local authorities took the initiative to erect a monument to commemorate the victims of terrorism. The seven-meter-tall monument, representing a mother and a child with severed limbs, was inaugurated on 11 September 2007—the International Day of the Fight against Terrorism.

it was first screened in the fall of 2005, the party did not react; however, when it was aired for the first time on Bulgarian National Television in June 2007 and reached a mass audience, the reaction was immediate. Ataka's newspaper called it “yet another impudent anti-Bulgarian provocation,” and the party leader Siderov accused the filmmakers of distorting history in Parliament. Party supporters backed by the VMRO youth organization protested in front of the building of the television and demanded the resignation of its director general because of the “outrageous lies” in the movie, which presented the Bulgarians as “oppressors.”⁸³

The nationalists' critique of the MRF's version of the “revival process” sometimes reached extremes, as was the case with the fountain monument in the village of Trínak. In March 2007, on the eve of the anniversary of the Bunovo terrorist attack carried out by the Bulgarian Turks whose names were inscribed on this monument, the Bulgarian National Union (BNU) and the political movement Gvardia organized a march in Burgas, demanding the destruction of this “shameful monument of terrorists.”⁸⁴ The BNU leader Boian Rasate threatened that if the local authorities did not dismantle the fountain, the Union activists would do it, even if this would lead to ethnic clashes. A few months later, a video appeared on YouTube showing young men who were trying to destroy the monument with mattocks. In response, Turkish hackers blocked the websites of two Bulgarian ministries. The media accused Ataka of shooting the video, but the party distanced itself from the event, calling it “ethnically motivated act of vandalism.”⁸⁵ The attitude of the nationalist organizations toward the memory of the “revival process” is very selective. They focus on events that help their immediate political interests, generally those aimed against the MRF and the way it takes advantage of its participation in government. Consequently, these parties' initiatives for remembering the “revival process” gather limited support, mostly from their core followers.

The role of academic research and history textbooks in remembering the “revival process” and shaping the collective memory remained limited. This was definitely not due to the lack of serious research; in fact, the passage of time and the open archives has facilitated the work of professional historians.⁸⁶

⁸³ Dimităr V. Avramov, “Surogatit ‘Otkradnati ochi’ unizhava natsionalnoto ni dostoinstvo,” *Ataka*, 19 June 2007, 4; see http://news.ibox.bg/news/id_1159334710; and <http://parliament.bg/?page=plSt&Stype=show&Ing=bg&id=311>.

⁸⁴ “Politicheski organizatsii iskat da bide siborena cheshmata v Trínak,” *Burgas Info*, 8 March 2007, <http://www.burgasinfo.com>.

⁸⁵ Lilia Chaleva, “Ataka si izmi rítsete za cheshmata v Trínak,” <http://news.dir.bg>, 5 September 2007.

⁸⁶ There are two books on the topic: Evgenia Ivanova, *Otkhvîrlenite “priobshteni” ili protsesit, narechen “vîzroditelen” (1912–1989)* (Sofia: IIEH, 2002); Mikhail Gruev and Alexei Kalonski, *Vîzroditeleniat protses. Myusiulmanskite obshtnosti i komunisticheskiat rezhim* (Sofia:

The general public received access to the actual documents in voluminous collections.⁸⁷ The media interest, however, was short-lived because this research did not result in sensational revelations that could be used as political weapons.

The attitudes of young people, who have the potential to influence the collective memory, is of particular interest. Between January 2008 and January 2009 I carried out a survey among eighty-three students from St. Kliment Ohridski University of Sofia/Sofia University. All were pursuing degrees in history, international relations, or public relations. The survey included sixteen freshmen, nineteen sophomores, fourteen juniors, and nineteen seniors, or sixty-eight undergraduates, alongside fifteen graduate students from the History Department. All respondents were born in the second half of the 1980s and had no personal memories of the event (with two exceptions). The students were asked to answer the question: "What is your notion and assessment of the 'revival process'?" It was clearly explained to them that the goal of the survey was not to examine their knowledge about the event. Around half of the respondents had had lectures on the topic (although it is unclear how many had attended them).

Most of the young people (86%) were aware that the "revival process" was part of Bulgaria's recent past. Only 2.5% stated firmly that they were not interested in the topic. Two answers contained an element of memory, both connected to the turbulent summer of 1989. Despite their brevity, they demonstrate both the role of the media and the perceptions of individual Bulgarians ("TV reports"; "Garelov's interviews"; "the luggage-laden cars along the border"; "I remember how teachers, colleagues of my mother, sang songs from the time of the Bulgarian National Revival"; "I believed that the change of the names is a true awakening of the Bulgarian national spirit"; "I thought that this 'process' was a retribution for all the atrocities the Turks committed against our people in the Ottoman era"; "I was afraid to travel by train" following the terrorist bomb act at the railway station in Plovdiv). The majority of the students do not cite their source of information. Significantly, no one mentioned school or textbooks; three students said that they learned about the event from their grandmothers, from witnesses of the "process," and from the media coverage on the files of the former Bulgarian secret services. Only one student explicitly mentioned university lectures.

The majority were clearly familiar with its core component: "the forceful change of names." Only six students pointed out the emigration of the Bulgarian

Siela, 2008); as well as parts of a monograph: Ibrahim Yalimov, *Istoriia na turskata obshtnost v Bilgariia* (Sofia: IK "Ilinda-Evtimov," 2002), and many articles.

⁸⁷ Iskra Baeva and Evgenia Kalinova, eds., "*Vizroditeleniia protses*." *Bilgarskata dŕzhava i bilgarskite turtsi (sredata na 30-te—nachaloto na 90-te godini na XX vek)*, vol. 1 (Sofia: Dŕzhavna agentsiia "Arkhivi," 2009). See also the above mentioned volumes edited by Veselin Angelov.

Turks in the summer of 1989, and only one tried to give a deeper and more complete description of the “revival process” as “an artificial and forceful imposition on a target minority of foreign elements, such as names, clothing, life-style, worldview, customs, culture, etc.” In the answers of 12% of the students there are errors or inaccuracies, often stemming from contemporary assessments. All students, however, emphasize its forceful nature, ranging from “a brutal process with merciless repressions” and “a high point of the repressions in this country” to the opinion that “the process was almost entirely peaceful, with a very limited number of repressions, but it was nonetheless a violation of human rights.”

A small group of twelve participants (14%) tried to identify the causes of the “revival process.” For some, the main factor was the desire of the BCP leadership, and Zhivkov in particular, to “homogenize the Bulgarian society,” to “Bulgarize the Bulgarian Turks,” and even to create an “ethnically pure nation.” One answer even summarized the event as “an expression of nationalism in its Balkan version.” Others stressed the “fear from the Turkish minority and the reluctance to allow it to make any claims.” According to them, the “revival process” was “necessary in terms of national security” as Zhivkov tried to “protect the integrity of the state and to prevent any future desire of the Turks to achieve autonomy within Bulgaria.” These answers also point to external factors: “the corresponding process in Cyprus” and the better-developed argument that “it was necessary to stop the double-dealing policy of Turkey toward the Turkish population in Bulgaria—on the one hand, the claim that their mother country Turkey expected them and wanted them to return, on the other hand, accepting only a limited number of immigrants, and only Turks from regions that are of little strategic importance for Turkey.” Only two students placed the reasons behind the “process” into a much wider political and ideological perspective.⁸⁸

The consequences of the process were deemed negative, stressing the impact on the economy (“Bulgaria lost one productive segment of its population and many areas were left deserted”), on the country’s reputation and, most importantly, on interethnic relations. All in all, sixty-four participants expressed their attitude toward the event. Their answers varied between strictly negative, strictly positive, and neutral (pointing both negative and positive aspects or not taking a firm position). “Strictly negative” assessments were most common and were given by forty students: a “mistake” of the communist leadership, a “stain” on Bulgaria, etc. There is more moderate wording (“not a very good idea,” “it is

⁸⁸ One of the answers states that the “revival process” is “only a part of a larger government agenda to put an emphasis on national aspects in order to conceal the problems of the system”; according to the other assessment, it was a “violation of Left ideas, caused by the advance of revisionist right ideas and chauvinism.”

not right," "this is not the way"), as well as very emotional expressions ("terrible, uncivilized," "an incredibly ugly and unjust act," "a brutal process," "an absurd plan," "close to racism"). Although negative, part of the answers included some further qualifications: "at the time it may have had its objective motives;" "I don't approve, but I don't think we need to constantly apologize about it." The main factor behind the negative attitude of students is their perception of the "revival process" as a violation of human rights.

Only four students gave a strictly positive assessment. With the exception of the short "I approve of it," the other answers reflected to a certain extent contemporary problems and fears: "One day there will be a world conflict between Christendom and Islam, and it is better to have fewer Muslims in Bulgaria, especially Turks"; "Considering the current situation, I give a rather positive assessment (not as an act of force, but as a political necessity)"; "My assessment is positive, because I believe that our idea of ethnic tolerance is mistaken. There are boundaries that minorities should not cross, such as demanding more rights than the local population and, even more, using them to threaten the national interest. The problem is that today certain groups gain dividends from these past events."

A group of twenty students took a middle ground. Some refused to give an assessment on the ground that they did not have enough information about the "process." Others, with good knowledge about the event, tried to balance the generally accepted negative attitude (which they share) with a different perspective, focusing on some less-well-known aspects. They compare it with policies from previous historical periods and in neighboring countries: "It was not the best decision, but previous policies were no better"; "On the one hand, such actions aimed at the assimilation of certain communities are traditional and even ordinary for all Balkan states (Yugoslavia, Greece, Romania, Turkey, as well as for Bulgaria), but, on the other hand, this was a human tragedy. It put both ethnic Turks and the Bulgarian population, which suffered from acts of terrorism, through an ordeal." Some students emphasize the direct relationship between minority policies and national security. They described the "revival process" as "an example of the old conflict between national security and human rights—it was a violation of human rights, but its goal was to protect Bulgarian territorial and national integrity," or as "a policy which aimed to protect the interests of the country, but was carried out in an unsuitable way." Two opinions best summarize the view of this group: "My assessment is rather neutral. There are negative aspects in the way it was carried out, but it also had its reasons in both law and history"; "This was part of state policy. There shouldn't be too much speculation. We need to assess it objectively."

I would like to conclude this chapter on the memory of the "revival process" by highlighting some considerations from my position as historian. Because of its forceful nature and its violation of the basic human rights of Bulgarian

Turks, Bulgarian society generally sees the process as negative. This unanimous assessment can hardly provoke any debates. The remaining “blank spots” are being filled by documents, but their analysis does not always correspond to individual memories. This sometimes provokes an emotional denial of the results of critical research based on documents.⁸⁹ On the other hand, the temptation to take a selective approach to both documents and individual memory in order to acquire political dividends is always present. A balanced approach to the “revival process” as a historical event would require knowledge of both archival documents and the memories of the affected Bulgarian citizens (Turks, as well as Bulgarians). The emphasis would be on explanation, not on judgment or condemnation. Whether the public and the politicians are willing and ready to listen to these explanations is another matter. For the moment, this topic illustrates keenly Milan Kundera’s observation that “man desires a world where good and evil can be clearly distinguished, for he has an innate and irrepressible desire to judge before he understands.”⁹⁰

⁸⁹ An example is the discussion at Sofia University in May 2009, commemorating the anniversary of the May 1989 demonstrations of Bulgarian Turks. Titled “Against the Political Monopoly on History: The Other Narrative about the May Resistance of the Turkish Population in 1989—Twenty Years Later,” it involved students, professors, and former participants in the resistance against the “revival process.”

⁹⁰ Milan Kundera, *The Art of the Novel* (New York: Harper and Row, 1988), 7.

29. Websites of Memory: In Search of the Forgotten Past

Cristina Petrescu

This chapter was initially meant to illustrate the uniqueness of Romanian communism on the basis of memories of everyday life in the 1980s. As a survivor of those years, I remember a lot of “exotic” little things from our miserable existence that could have hardly happened somewhere else than in Romania. The image of a long queue of subdued individuals who were standing armed with bags in front of a shop or that of a jubilant man who carried victoriously several toilet paper rolls were familiar to all those who lived behind the Iron Curtain. Yet, I have never heard that colleagues from other former communist countries had to ever wear their winter coats inside their homes, prepare their homework by the light of a gas lamp or candle, or bathe only once a week because heating, electricity, and running water were considered by the decaying regime not public utilities indispensable to modern urban life, but a luxury that could be cut down. The preliminary research on the Internet led me to a huge number of websites full of spontaneous recollections from before 1989 that recapture the gradual disappearance of the welfare dimension of the Romanian communist regime. However, an unforeseen and more interesting direction of inquiry was revealed to me when I discovered the recollections of my generation. As compared to private memories fixed in print, which more often than not were meant to construct the legacy of their authors, these recollections posted in the virtual space had no other stake than to recapture things past before they would be irremediably lost. For the first time since the collapse of communism, I found recollections that could have been mine, the recollections of urban individuals with a higher level of education, who made sense of the recent past in a similar way as I did. Moreover, I realized that, in comparison to those older or younger, our generation’s identity was crucially shaped by a double experience: we are old enough to remember what communism was like, but young enough to have successfully adapted to the new political, social, and economic context. This chapter is dedicated to our collective remembering of Romanian communism and illustrates, by default, the uniqueness of our experience in the Soviet bloc at the time when these regimes, without us realizing it, were about to collapse.

In post-1989 Romania, the communist past has been publicly represented for twenty years as a historical period marked by deep sufferings caused by an "illegitimate and criminal" regime. According to this reading of the recent past, Romanians constantly refused to accept this regime, in the beginning by fighting heroically against it and, after the secret police crushed any opposition, by resisting subversively (since networks of open dissent never developed in this country). This representation originated in a national project that strove to popularize the criminal dimension of the communist regime in response to the post-1989 electoral success of the former apparatchiks who had reorganized politically for interparty competition. This project was meant to support the reconstruction of political pluralism and civil society by teaching the Romanians (who, in 1989, knew virtually nothing about their own "true" postwar history) that the essence of communism was terror and repression. Consequently, one of the top priorities of the transition was the recuperation of the suppressed memory, especially that of former political prisoners and survivors of the so-called "resistance in the mountains" to the communist takeover.

Commemoration of the victims and celebration of the heroes were crucial for a society that just came out of a dictatorship and was engaged in building a new democracy. However, neither professional reconstructions nor personal memories should be submitted to this rational process of selecting only those bits of the nondemocratic past that ought to never be forgotten. Nevertheless, this societal project, which outlived the early postcommunist context that generated it, shaped all genres of representing the recent past in post-1989 Romania. Embraced by the largest majority of those active in the public sphere, this project (self)censored public remembrance and marginalized any alternative versions of this past. Thus, all public representations have reiterated for twenty years a unique collective narrative on communism that focuses on the sufferings and the heroism of Romanians in facing the dictatorship. This dominant representation actively forgets much more than it actually remembers.

The first reaction to this sustained hegemonic representation, which gave particular emphasis to the earlier period of terror and resistance, has quietly emerged in recent years. Beyond traditional media debates there emerged a different vision of the communist past, centered on the later and more ambiguous period. An ideal platform for expressing private memories that had been previously repressed proved to be the Internet. People who wanted to express their personal experiences from before 1989 established websites for this purpose, some of which became extremely popular.¹ Memories from childhood,

¹ Perhaps the most successful weblog in terms of popularity is www.igu.ro/latrecut. Among the newspapers and TV channels that launched "memory campaigns," see <http://www.ziua.ro>, <http://www.evz.ro>, <http://www.adevarul.ro>, <http://www.realitatea.net>. See also the cycle "Amintiri din iepoca de aur" (Memories from the golden epoch [sic!]), available on <http://www>.

artifacts long out of use, and photographs representing a bygone material world reminded everyone of a forgotten past. These memories were generated by a spontaneous wish to remember rather than a rational process of selecting what is worthy of being remembered.

This alternative representation of the communist past was not restricted to the Internet; in fact, it was publicly initiated shortly before Romania's entry into the European Union via several TV commercials. At approximately the same time, several newspapers, TV channels, and museums initiated campaigns to collect memories and photographs related to everyday life during the so-called "Golden Age," as Ceaușescu's rule was officially referred to before 1989. This tendency to record previously neglected memories of communism gained momentum after the release of a successful series of cinematic narratives based on "urban legends" of the 1980s. These movies represented the first coherent attempt to create a nontragic account of Romanian communism.² Yet, these endeavors are still marginal and are hardly reflected in printed publications. Nevertheless, these alternative memories are so similar that those who articulated them may be assumed to form a coherent group that emerged as a new vector of memory.³ Each of its members wished to remember a past that was theirs, but which did not exist in the publicly expressed narratives about communism. The vision of the past that has emerged from these impromptu recollections smacks of nostalgia, but it does not directly challenge the dominant public representation of communism. In fact, it rarely entered into a dialogue with the hegemonic understanding of the recent past and, moreover, never claimed to represent a conflicting, but rather a complementary perspective.

This chapter focuses on this tendency to remember Romanian communism on the Internet. Several questions arose in the course of this study. First, who

morar.catavencu.ro. The National History Museum of Romania has its own site, which was made in similar fashion by a new generation of historians and is available on <http://www.comunismulinromania.ro>. Finally, the commercialization of memorabilia that remind one of communism is also emerging in Romania, yet only virtually. See <http://www.suvenirshop.ro>.

² Authored by five young directors, Cristian Mungiu, Ioana Uricaru, Hanno Hoefer, Constantin Popescu, and Răzvan Mărculescu, *Amintiri din Epoca de Aur* (Tales from the Golden Age) was released in two parts: first, *Comrades, Life is Beautiful!*, was launched in Romanian cinemas on 25 September 2009; the second, *Love in One's Spare Time*, on 23 October 2009. The titles of the seven parts give one a first idea about their content as well as the comical mode in which the stories were cast: "The Legend of the Official Visit"; "The Legend of the Party Photographer"; "The Legend of the Zealous Apparatchik"; "The Legend of the Greedy Policeman"; "The Legend of the Air Sellers"; "The Legend of the Chicken Driver"; "The Legend of the Flying Turkey." The premiere of this cinematic narrative gave momentum to other initiatives. A contest for the most interesting "urban legend" of the 1980s was launched in newspapers. See <http://www.amintiridinepocadeaur.ro>.

³ I use this term as Henry Rousso did with regard to the memory of the Second World War in France. Henry Rousso, *The Vichy Syndrome: History and Memory in France since 1944* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

was part of this new vector of memory, how old where they, what level of education had they reached, what were their social origins and what was their relation to the communist past? Second, what did the group actually remember, how did their memories differ from existing public representations, and what was the content of their nostalgia, the bits of the past that no longer exist but the group longs for in their recollections? Put in a nutshell, this study argues that recent recollections of Romanian communism by a young, urban, and highly educated generation captured the defunct political order not because that order was vanishing, but because their *milieux de mémoire* (environments of memory) were disappearing under the combined pressure of the market economy, new information technologies and fundamental social changes. As their *milieux de mémoire* landed in the garbage bin of history, the consciousness of this break with the past generated not only the will to remember, but also that of creating their own *lieux de mémoire* (not sites but rather websites of memory).⁴

Generations Remember Communism: "The End of Ideology?"

In Romania, one can say that three successive generations have acquired experience of communism (to use the commonly accepted definition of the "old regime," entrenched in Romanian postcommunist debates under the influence of Western vocabulary used by services broadcast in Eastern European languages). Representatives of all three age groups outlived communism and became involved in the process of remembering the communist past. It goes without saying that generations are not homogenous and that, more often than not, there is a great diversity within each age group, hence any such taxonomy is inevitably simplistic. Yet, each of the three generations is defined by specific social and political formative experiences and, more importantly, by different life expectations that derived from such experiences. Each generation reached maturity at a different stage in the evolution of the communist regime, which influenced its past perception of the system and its current relation to the communist past. In short, it is important to take into account the extent to which the above-mentioned vector of memory also represents a certain generation with a particular type of socialization under and perception of communism.

The first age group, which might be defined as the *generation of 1945*, had already reached adulthood at the time of the communist takeover. Thus, its po-

⁴ Pierre Nora observes that sites of memory are always created in reaction to the disappearance of an epoch and everything associated with it in the attempt to preserve it at least in memory. Nora also underlines that the will to remember that epoch plays a crucial role in establishing a site of memory. "There are sites of memory, *lieux de mémoire*, because there are no longer *milieux de mémoire*, real environments of memory" ("Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* 26 (1989): 7–24, quotation from page 7.

litical socialization was completed under a pluralist political order. Consequently, this generation was more heterogeneous than later ones. At one end of the spectrum, it comprised people whose support for the new regime was based either on deep convictions or on sheer opportunism. At the other end, it included those who were more or less arbitrarily defined as “class enemies” by the new regime, and ended up in prison or suffered other forms of suppression in public or professional contexts. Members of this generation who remembered communism after 1989 belong to one of the two antagonistic “generation units.”⁵ One unit comprised prominent *nomenklatura* members at the time of the revolution, while the other unit contained leaders of the reestablished “historical parties,” many of whom were survivors of the Romanian Gulag.

Unlike in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the “true believers” represented an insignificant minority even among the former group, a fact which has been usually explained by the weakness of the Romanian left. Before 1945, the Communist Party in Romania had been a small clique of underdogs rather than an avant-garde party dominated by intellectuals who were willing to change the world for the better.⁶ It is for this reason that people in postcommunist Romania generally agree that the communists from the generation of 1945 were not committed to building a more just social and political order, but rather determined to destroy the old one. Consequently, former communist leaders and members of the *nomenklatura* from this generation represented a rather discredited group in postcommunism, who were associated with the disasters to which the country succumbed after forty-five years of communist rule. Although they made themselves heard in public, their voice did not contribute to the collective representation of communism in postcommunism.⁷

On the contrary, people at the other end of the spectrum (who were oppressed under the postwar political order, or who opposed it) formed the most significant vector of memory after the collapse of communism. As in other countries of the Soviet bloc, the voice of the repressed was mostly silenced until

⁵ Karl Mannheim, “The Problem of Generations,” in *Essays* (London & New York: Routledge, 1952), 276–322.

⁶ Stelian Tănase, *Clienții lui Tanti Varvara* (Bucharest: Humanitas, 2005). The author’s assessment of the rank and file as well as prominent leaders is not flattering. Based on an extensive study of documents from the party archive, and from the archive of the interwar secret services, Tănase depicted Hieronymus Bosch-like portraits of the most prominent party old-timers and illustrated the long series of betrayals and assassinations that marked the network of communist militants operating on Romanian territory. For the influence of Marxist ideas on the Romanian intelligentsia, see Vladimir Tismăneanu, “From Arrogance to Irrelevance: Avatars of Marxism in Romania,” in *The Road to Disillusion: From Critical Marxism to Postcommunism in Eastern Europe*, ed. Raymond Taras (Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 1992), 135–50.

⁷ For more on this, see Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “The Canon of Remembering Romanian Communism: From Autobiographical Recollections to Collective Representations,” included in this volume, 43–69.

1989. Moreover, the absence of dissident networks in Romania in the 1970s and 1980s prevented the development of any alternative public sphere, in which they might have expressed themselves publicly. Thus, their counter-memory of communism was mostly preserved symbolically in artifacts, for instance, which recalled missing persons who never returned from the Gulag. As a reaction, after 1989, the prison memoirs emerged as the most consistent body of published recollections of the recent past.⁸ Public recognition of people who had suffered such forms of injustice and the preservation of this memory for younger generations who had no experience of the Romanian Gulag were justifiably considered to be societal priorities; anything else would have been simply inhumane. Their voice in the postcommunist public sphere was not only numerically stronger than that of the discredited *nomenklatura*, but also significantly amplified by the following generation, which borrowed and popularized a vision of communism that had been emerging from the recollections of the sinister period of terror rather than recalling their own experiences of the former regime.

This second age group, which might be labeled as the *generation of 1968*, consists of people who were exclusively socialized under communism. Most of them were born after the war; only the older segment of this age group briefly experienced the previous regime as small children. Consequently, this generation possessed generally formal knowledge of the precommunist period that it acquired in school, and learned relatively little informally from their family and friends.⁹ Unlike the previous generation, this age group no longer lived in the hope that a reversal of the political order was possible. For them, communism was here to stay in Romania. This radical change in expectations also explains their passivity, which contrasts with the commitment of the generation of 1945 to organizing resistance to communist takeover. Moreover, when they reached adulthood in the 1960s, the Romanian communist regime had entered a period marked by political openness and ideological relaxation, while the living standards had visibly improved and a type of socialist consumerism flourished.

More importantly, the Romanian generation of 1968 had acquired very different experiences than those of its counterparts from other former communist

⁸ For an analysis of these autobiographical recollections, see this author's chapter, "The Afterlife of the Securitate: On Moral Correctness in Postcommunist Romania," included in this volume, 385–415.

⁹ There is evidence that knowledge transferred from one generation to the next. The memory of precommunist Romania was the object of common socialization between the two generations, as shown by the drawer recordings published as Alexandru Paleologu and Stelian Tănase, *Sfidarea memoriei* (Bucharest: Du Style, 1996). Books that implicitly than explicitly conferred a mythical dimension on interwar Romania also met with huge success. Perhaps the most well-known example is Gabriel Liiceanu, *Jurnalul de la Păltiniș: Un model paideic în cultura umanistă* (Bucharest: Cartea Românească, 1983). This diary gives one the impression that the protagonists lived as if they were in interwar Romania, engaging in philosophical debates to evade everyday ideological pressure.

countries. Elsewhere, this age group was marked by the repression of the Prague Spring, which put an end to the illusions that “socialism with a human face” could be turned into reality. On the contrary, this was the most glorious year of communism in Romania, when this country and its inhabitants enjoyed the glory of having refused to join the invading armies, as expressed by Nicolae Ceaușescu.¹⁰ Thus, the Romanian generation of 1968 reacted quite differently to communism; for years, it entertained the illusion that this regime was heading toward greater liberties. Consequently, there was a huge wave of enrollment in the Romanian Communist Party that touched even former political prisoners.¹¹ By the end of the 1970s, such illusions disappeared, so that only opportunists continued to support the regime in the 1980s. In short, disillusionment arrived later in Romania than in other communist countries. Such experiences, however, are hardly remembered by anyone, except for former party apparatchiks.

It is also worth noting that this age group was not as polarized as the previous one. In other words, it is much more difficult to draw a line between victims and perpetrators than in the generation of 1945.¹² On the one hand, individuals from this generation had no experience of the Romanian Gulag, for a general amnesty had been granted in 1964. On the other hand, few of the people who joined the party apparatus had enough time to attain senior positions until the end of the regime. This is not to say that this age group was homogenous, for its members opted for different ways of coping with the communist regime. Consequently, this generation became increasingly polarized by the end of the 1970s and in particular during the 1980s, as expectations that the regime would accept greater liberties gradually vanished. Antagonism arose between those

¹⁰ As it became clear from archival documents, Romania was actually not invited by the other countries of the Warsaw Treaty Organization to join in invading Czechoslovakia. However, the balcony speech condemning the invasion of August 1968 helped Nicolae Ceaușescu to capitalize politically and legitimized the regime through consent. Nevertheless, this moment marked the end of the short-lived political liberalization in communist Romania rather than its beginning. Dragoș Petrescu, “Legitimacy, Nation-Building and Closure: Meanings and Consequences of the Romanian August of 1968,” in *The Prague Spring and the Warsaw Pact Invasion of Czechoslovakia, 1968*, ed. M. Mark Stolarik (Mundelein, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2010), 237–59.

¹¹ A telling example is that of writer Paul Goma, who was formerly put into prison for his participation in the student revolt of 1956, and later, in 1977, initiated a movement for human rights under the influence of Charter 77. However, after Ceaușescu’s balcony speech of 22 August 1968, he joined the patriotic forces to defend Romania from a potential Soviet attack. Soon after, he enrolled in the Communist Party to be among the few who had the courage to resign later. Paul Goma, *Amnezia la români* (Bucharest: Litera, 1992), 53–55.

¹² This is not to say that it is simple to draw a line between victims and perpetrators in the generation of 1945, for the regime knew how to blur this line by compelling victims to turn into informers of the secret police. As for the generation of 1968, a spectacular case is that of the late dissident Mihai Botez, who was accused of offering information to the secret police about another dissident, Dorin Tudoran, after the release of the latter’s file. Dorin Tudoran, ed., *Eu, fiul lor: Dosar de Securitate* (Iași: Polirom, 2010), 13–29.

who chose to support the regime openly for opportunistic reasons and those who tried to remain detached while risking professional marginalization. Few of those who chose the latter were to become dissidents in the late 1970s and the 1980s, while the rest were only getting by, thinking that nothing could be done, for the secret police was omnipresent and omnipotent.

After 1989, most representatives of the generation of 1968 disseminated the memories of their predecessors who had survived the Romanian Gulag out of the sense of duty to commemorate the victims and hail the heroes of the recent past. Able to control symbolically public debates and delegitimize any memories that did not fit into the story of suffering and bravery in facing the communist dictatorship, this generation was instrumental in popularizing the criminal dimension of the regime for the sake of building a future democracy. While the future of Romanian democracy seemed still insecure, there was no time for nuances; the message to the public had to be clear: communism was an atrocious dictatorship, which should never ever return to Romania. This perspective on communism was also not seriously challenged because left-wing ideas barely have genuine supporters in this country. The precommunist political traditions partly explain the weak appeal of the left in postcommunism, but the civic-militant commitment in opposition to the newly emerging left-wing of the neo-communists certainly pushed most public intellectuals to the political right.¹³

Yet, even after the reversal of the political order was no longer probable, the short-lived liberalization of the 1960s remained forgotten, as an insignificant intermezzo between the terror which followed the takeover and the shortages which preceded the collapse. This period of political openness and cultural re-orientation toward the West, which paradoxically coincided with the youth of the generation of 1968, represents a void in the collective memory of communism. Accordingly, the main postcommunist thesis on Romanian communism, turned into a cliché, is epitomized in the phrase "Stalinism for All Seasons."¹⁴ While different visions on the past confronted each other everywhere in post-communist Europe, there was therefore only one in Romania. Nostalgia for the recent past was rightfully considered indecent in light of the fact that many for-

¹³ This political option turned Romania's public intellectuals into an exception in comparison with their counterparts in the "older" democracies of Western Europe or the newer ones in East-Central Europe. Interesting in this respect is the polemic stirred by the open letter of one Hungarian intellectual from Transylvania addressed to his Romanian colleagues. Mircea Vasilescu, ed., *Intellectualul român față cu inacțiunea: În jurul unei scrisori a lui G. M. Tamás* (Bucharest: Curtea Veche, 2002).

¹⁴ Vladimir Tismăneanu, *Stalinism for All Seasons: A Political History of Romanian Communism* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2003; Romanian version: Iași: Polirom, 2005). Although this work was published when the interest in the communist past was already fading away, this thesis also shaped Tismăneanu's earlier writings, later encapsulated in this volume, and so influenced most of the Romanian students of communism.

mer victims had never received significant reparation from the postcommunist state, even though public debate was dominated by the story of suffering under communism, as described above. This precluded many people from sharing publicly any recollections that might have been considered as softening the hegemonic representation.¹⁵ Yet, nostalgia for the pre-1989 past is neither a disease of those sick enough to regret the passing of a criminal regime nor a symptom of a “Gulag denial.” More often than not, it derives directly from the disappointment with the present rather than the desire to restore the past. As such, it actually plays a curative function.¹⁶

A new tendency to remember communism while openly expressing nostalgia for a bygone past emerged only when Romania was on the verge of European integration. Since then, nostalgia has gained increasing support from the third generation that experienced communism, which might be called the *generation of 1989*. Among the oldest in this age group are those individuals who were once labeled as “children of the decree” (*decreeți*), i.e., those who were born immediately after abortion was officially banned in 1966.¹⁷ It is this age subgroup which reached maturity at the time of the revolution that made up the majority of the anticommunist demonstrators in December 1989, and constituted the largest lot among the victims.¹⁸ The younger segment of this generation comprises those individuals who were old enough at the time of the revolution to have acquired their own memories of the shootings on the streets.¹⁹ This

¹⁵ The long postponement of transitional justice, which was nevertheless constantly demanded by civil society as the only genuine break with the communist past, turned the preservation of victims’ memory into the substitute of the retribution for wrongdoings and restitution for sufferings. Cristina Petrescu and Dragoș Petrescu, “Retribution, Remembering, Representation: On Romania’s Incomplete Break with the Communist Past,” in *Geschichtsbilder in den postdiktatorischen Ländern Europas: Auf der Suche nach historisch-politischen Identitäten*, eds. Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stokłosa (Münster: Lit Verlag, 2009), 155–82.

¹⁶ Maria Todorova, “Introduction: From Utopia to Propaganda and Back,” in *Post-Communist Nostalgia*, eds. idem and Zsuzsa Gille (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1–13.

¹⁷ The legal prohibition of abortion by Decree 770/1966, combined with the endemic shortage of birth-control pills, caused a considerable increase of the birth rate. As this author remembers, three times more children were born after 1967 than before, which was reflected in the increase of the number of classes in schools. For more about Ceaușescu’s birthrate policy, see the classic volume by Gail Klingman, *The Politics of Duplicity: Controlling Reproduction in Ceaușescu’s Romania* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1998).

¹⁸ For a list of people injured or killed in the city of Timișoara, which includes the age of the victims, see Marius Mioc, *Revoluția din Timișoara și falsificatorii istoriei* (Timișoara: Sedona, 1999), 226–41.

¹⁹ For instance, one representative of the younger segment of this age group remembers that, during the revolution, there was a lot of talk (that he could not understand at the time) about victory and liberty, while all were very happy, including his family, in spite of the fact that they waited in line for bread without success so that everyone had to eat soup with pretzels. See comment by “Analu-chian,” posted 24 December 2006, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/12/generatia-x/#comments>.

third generation experienced communism prior to adulthood, as individuals completing their education. Thus, their memories refer primarily to school and other related activities, and appear to reflect nostalgia for their bygone youth. However, unlike their peers from other former communist countries, they do not have mostly pleasant memories, for all they can remember from before 1989 are the gloomy 1980s, whose day-to-day misery set Romania apart in the former Soviet bloc. As their memories illustrate, even grammar school children at that time, to say nothing of those who were already university students, were deeply affected by the deprivations of those years.

Although they vividly recollect the absurdities of the system that affected their daily lives, they are nevertheless the first generation to make fun of such memories.²⁰ In comparison to the generation of 1945, they are not driven by the desire to render justice for past injustice and sufferings. They also suffered, but not as much as those who experienced the communist takeover and the great terror. And in comparison to the generation of 1968, they did not have to constantly reiterate the idea that the dictatorship was so harsh that nothing could have been done to resist it in order to justify their acquiescence with the regime. They were too young to have been caught in the social networks supporting the survival of the former regime, so they could never be held responsible for any of the wrongdoings that characterized the past. Thus, unlike the previous age groups, the generation of 1989 produced narratives without guilt. And although they suffered, the fact that they were young at the time meant that they left communism behind without resentment and without wrath. Moreover, their recollections are non-ideological, whereas those of previous generations (whether intentionally or not) were. In short, their remembering is neither vindictive nor militant. As the past has increasingly become "another country," the last generation that experienced communism now faces the next generation that never knew communism. This encounter generates the drive to remember a distant part of their lives one moment before everything will be forever lost.

Remembering the 1980s: "*Mais où sont les neiges d'antan!*"

In his introductory essay to *Les lieux de mémoire*, the historian Pierre Nora observes that history is anchored in events, while memory is attached to sites and artifacts.²¹ Products and artifacts of the past create the material framework of

²⁰ Representatives of this generation also authored memoirs, which were published in printed form. The tragic mode in which these memoirs were written was copied from the memoirs of former generations in spite of the different content. In this respect, they contrast sharply with the memories expressed on the Internet. One such example is Paul Cernat et al., *O lume dispărută: Patru istorii personale urmate de un dialog cu H.-R. Patapievici* (Iași: Polirom, 2004).

²¹ Nora, "Between Memory and History," 22.

collective memory and thereby stimulate the process of remembering that past. In former communist countries, nostalgia for the pre-1989 past led to the commercial revival of popular products of that period and to the publication of catalogues of such products, artifacts, and recipes. Commercialization of products from communist times was driven by nostalgia, but also fueled nostalgia. This revival of former brands reveals a contradiction. It simultaneously represents a form of antiglobalization, resistance to the uniformity of consumption accompanying the market economy, as well as a skillful commercial strategy to use existing trademarks to reach potential buyers. The recent relaunch of Trabant, the famous car made in East Germany, epitomizes this trend toward the commercialization of nostalgia for the past. In Romania, however, a wave of nostalgia for past times appeared much later. It was triggered by the gradual removal of everyday artifacts from before 1989 from private houses, long after most communist brands had disappeared from shops. Some communist brands were revived more than a decade after the collapse, while others were never abandoned, such the Dacia car. The commercial strategy to promote such products benefited also from their association with communism and represented the first public appeal to nostalgia for this past.

The Romanian memorial websites dealt with in this chapter are used primarily to register catalogues of such artifacts from the past. There is a collective effort to remember how many types of bread or pastry existed, which sorts of chocolate or ice cream were considered to be the best, what kind of games children used to play, and what books were the most popular. All possible items from the past, which appear to have been found in some dusty corners or forgotten drawers, are photographed and catalogued. They vary greatly, from grammar school transcripts to shopping baskets from Alimentara, the standard grocery store of the communist period. Although this process is chaotic and requires better organization, it epitomizes people's need to preserve the material framework of a lifestyle that no longer exists.²² It is not an expression of restorative nostalgia, but a reflective remembrance of the past. In other words, it does not dream of returning to the past, but of recording it in order to save it from oblivion.²³

²² The directors of the recent movie *Amintiri din Epoca de Aur* confessed how difficult it was for them to reconstruct the clothing, the interiors of private houses with typical decorative objects, and above all the streets as they were in the communist period. Whereas clothing and artifacts could be collected via a public appeal for donations (although some objects were impossible to find, such as rings for pioneer ties), the reconstruction of the city as it was in the communist period had to be done by processing images on a computer. "We have somehow succeeded, at the last minute, before people forget how it was, to fix all these details on film," says Ioana Uricariu, one of the directors (Florentina Ciuvercă, "Epoca de Aur a renăscut în chinuri," *Evenimentul Zilei*, 26 September 2009, <http://www.evz.ro/articole/detalii-articol/869213/Epoca-de-Aur-a-renascut-in-chinuri-VIDEO>).

²³ On "restorative nostalgia" and "reflective nostalgia," see Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.

What memories were generated by the quest of the generation of 1989 to preserve the recent past? In this section, I shall explore the dual significance of these memories in relation to two questions. First, these memories are treated as historical sources that help us not to reconstruct political events (as in the case of the former *nomenklatura* or former political prisoners) but to reconstruct the everyday life of ordinary people, who were neither heroes nor victims before 1989. The first question one should ask, therefore, relates to the way in which these memories enrich the narrative of the communist past in Romania. In this respect, I distinguish between issues that are common to all countries of the Soviet bloc and specifically Romanian issues of the 1980s. Second, these memories are treated not as sources of the history of communism, but as sources of the memory of communism. They therefore represent symptomatic narratives of the age in which they were created. As a result, the traumatic relation with the dictatorial past that emerged in the first phase of postcommunism was followed by an attitude toward this recent past that was free of anger and underpinned by a narrative with witty undertones, even though comedy is often coupled with tragedy. This new type of remembrance was the first that dared to express nostalgia for the pre-1989 past. Accordingly, the second question to be explored relates to the kind of past the generation of 1989 longs for.

I argue that their nostalgia is not fueled by a wish to return to the time of sheltered existence, the fairer distribution of wealth, and everyday stability, as might have been the case in countries that experienced welfare dictatorships. Rather, they long for a lifestyle that disappeared from both of the formerly "antagonistic" (socialist and capitalist) camps at approximately the same time, once advanced technologies and means of communication spread after 1989 and brought the world closer together, while socially separating and alienating individuals from each other. The following comment epitomizes best the nostalgia of the generation of 1989: "While reading and writing down these memories—would you believe—I began to long for those times. A simple life in which any new thing that was more colorful or just different was a source of joy, and in which there was more solidarity and trust between individuals."²⁴ In this sense, the postcommunist nostalgia of the generation of 1989 is not very different from that expressed by their peers in "normal," i.e., democratic countries.

As historical sources for studying everyday life under communism, the memories of the generation of 1989 convey mainly narratives about family, friends, and school. Critics of *Alltagsgeschichte* claimed that this approach ro-

²⁴ Comment by "Iani," posted 16 January 2007. Another comment lamented the loss of stable social relations because of the Internet: "If we are no longer so close it is that because we now have a TV set with hundreds of programs and a computer. Thus, we see each other only on the Internet, we talk on the Internet, forgetting what it means to see friends every day" (comment by Dan Adrian, posted 22 April 2008, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/12/amintiri/comment-page-1/#comments>).

manticizes the past by emphasizing small joys instead of remembering sufferings.²⁵ In the case of Romania, even the memories of those who were small children in the 1980s are not entirely serene. Compared to previous generations, however, they do not “condemn” the communist past as a whole, but discern between “good” and “bad” things when comparing their experiences from before and after 1989. Moreover, this blend is rather balanced in the memories of the generation of 1989, as the following comment best illustrates: “Good things under communism: (1) the certainty of having a place of work; (2) the certainty of having an apartment; (3) the school system; (4) ONLY THIS. Bad things under communism: (1) there was nothing to buy with one’s salary; (2) hunger; (3) cold; (4) darkness.”²⁶ Thus, younger individuals, for whom communism is as alien as prehistory, remain often puzzled when reading the recollections of the last generation that experienced communism: “I still did not get it? Which period was better? Before 1989 or after?”²⁷

While these memories suggest that the educational system was better before 1989, they are counterbalanced by the memories of the profound scarcity of goods, the cold and darkness in private homes. In fact, the experience of childhood in Romania in the 1980s makes this age group stand out from peers in other former communist countries, where people did not live through such extreme forms of deprivation. Not surprisingly, queues (the quintessential everyday experience of a faulty planned economy) are a central part of the recollections of the generation of 1989.²⁸ Throughout the entire Soviet bloc, people used to stand in line in order to buy scarce goods, but in Romania, the endemic shortages of the 1980s transformed queuing into a “way of life,” the sole mode of survival,²⁹ with which children had to comply as well. While parents were at

²⁵ Alf Lüdtkke, “Introduction: What Is the History of Everyday Life and Who Are Its Practitioners?,” in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. idem (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), 12–15.

²⁶ Comment by “Nicu,” posted 7 April 2008, <http://lamisto.ablog.ro/2006-10-14/amintiri-din-comunism.html#comments>.

²⁷ Comment by “Alexandra,” who confessed that she was looking for inspiration on this website for an essay on school life under communism, posted 12 February 2009, <http://lamisto.ablog.ro/2006-10-14/amintiri-din-comunism.html#comments>.

²⁸ One comment summarizes how one perceived the shortages of the 1980s as a child: “Food was scarce, meat was rarely available, bread was rationed, as were oil, sugar and flour. For these things one had to stand in line for hours, sometimes at impossible hours (at 3 or 4 a.m.), and one even had to queue for toilet paper or soap. I did not know what chocolate was because such things were not available in shops. There were *eugenii* though” (comment by “Yoana,” posted 2 April 2008, <http://lamisto.ablog.ro/2006-10-14/amintiri-din-comunism.html#comments>; *eugenii* were popular biscuits with cream, whose production was resumed in postcommunism, and skillfully advertised as a nostalgia-stirring brand). For more on the lasting effects of the crisis in the 1980s, see <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/03/cozi>.

²⁹ Pavel Câmpeanu, *Români—Coadă pentru hrană. Un mod de viață* (Bucharest: Litera, 1994).

work, children took part in the hunt for basic foodstuffs together with their retired grandparents. Although getting up early and standing for many hours in line is remembered with bitterness, positive impressions are not entirely absent, for some claim that such childhood experiences could serve to better oneself.³⁰ Such recollections of queuing also convey a sense of loss, for the abundance characteristic of a market economy rid the act of acquiring a grocery product of its former meaning and pleasure. The difficulty of getting basic goods before 1989 lent these products an almost mythical dimension and transformed the act of acquiring them into an ultimate taste experience, in spite of their dubious qualities: "Those ice creams made of frozen water were so good! And *savarinele* (creamy cakes) and the grill that one used to eat only when invited to someone else's place! And now you want 'something good,' but you do not know what?!"³¹ In short, the memories of the Romanian generation of 1989 suggest that happiness was easier to attain at that time precisely because life was full of everyday hardships.

An even more poignant characteristic of the Romanian "exceptionalism" of the 1980s than the endemic shortages of basic foodstuffs, are people's strategies of coping with electricity or gas cuts, and the lack of heating and hot water. To a greater or a lesser extent, the supply of utilities and services characteristic to modern urban life was faulty in all former communist countries. In Romania, however, the decisions of the communist leadership to cut the consumption of the population to counterbalance the shortage of raw materials caused a genuine process of demodernization in the 1980s.³² Although basic household appliances (TV sets, refrigerators, vacuum cleaners, irons, washing machines, though not dishwashers, which remained a symbol of the affluent West until 1989)

³⁰ "Even the 'lines' that everyone remembers proved to be pretty useful when educating children. First of all we learned to be respectful (because most people in lines were retired people), to be patient, orderly and disciplined, to be hardworking (because one often had to wake up very early to get a place in line). We acquired many qualities when waiting in these 'lines.' Even though people had to queue [for basic food], even though many goods were rationed, in the end nobody died of hunger" (comment by "Corina," posted 20 March 2008, <http://lamisto.ablog.ro/2006-10-14/amintiri-din-comunism.html#comments>).

³¹ Comment by "Mirela," posted 26 June 2007, <http://lamisto.ablog.ro/2006-10-14/amintiri-din-comunism.html#comments>.

³² The historian Vlad Georgescu, the head of the Romanian service of Radio Free Europe from 1983 and until his death in 1988, defined this process of demodernization as follows: "Under the guise of austerity, the regime imposed on the country an almost bizarre process of demodernization... The media constantly appealed to peasants to replace mechanical with manual work, and to use carts and horses instead of trucks and tractors. Commercial firms were advised to transport merchandise on tricycles. The use of refrigerators and washing machines was officially discouraged and restricted, and coal irons and oil lamps were recommended as energy savers, in preference to electrical appliances" (Vlad Georgescu, *The Romanians: A History* [London: I. B. Tauris & Co, 1991], 272).

became available and affordable after the 1960s, their use was constantly discouraged in the 1980s via propaganda urging people to save energy. The temperature in apartments during winter time was around 15°C, and the pressure of gas was so low that it was difficult to boil even an egg, while the electricity supply was cut off every day in the evening, running water was supplied only a couple of hours a day, and hot water became a rare luxury.³³ According to a widespread joke of the time, the only thing colder than cold water in Romania was hot water.³⁴

This process of demodernization is also reflected in the recollections of the generation of 1989, albeit in a self-ironical manner: they remember how they had to cover themselves with a tent in order to be warm enough to sleep, and how they had to go to the dinning room dressed in a winter coat, while their parents tried various makeshift methods to heat the apartment. They also remember the evenings when they had to do their homework by the light of a gas lamp, one of the hallmarks of Romanian communism in the 1980s.³⁵ The reduction of gas pressure during daytime forced Romanians to cook at night,³⁶ and to resort to the rural tradition of cooking on an open fire which, time permitting,

³³ Michael Shafir, *Romania: Politics, Economics and Society: Political Stagnation and Simulated Change* (London: Frances Pinter Publishers, 1985), esp. 117–18.

³⁴ This haiku-like joke was found in Romania by Ben Lewis, and included as the epitome of the mania of joking, which “laughed communism out of existence in Eastern Europe” in his *Hammer & Tickle: The History of Communism Told Through Communist Jokes* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 2008), 3.

³⁵ “One of the saddest memories of my childhood relates to a gas lamp with which we strained our eyes to do our homework to when electricity cuts were introduced to save energy. In the same category are the bricks that were put in the gas oven [to warm the bed] and the fact that we used to sleep all in the same room because we could not heat the whole apartment [with such means]. Middle Age landscape, but in a block of flats...” (comment by “Grim Reaper,” posted 31 March 2006, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/03/za-darc-said/#comments>). Power cuts were remembered with somewhat more nostalgia because they could be a blessing in disguise, if used as an excuse for failing to do homework. “If I go back in the past, I [remember that I] was always happy when there were power cuts, because I could skip homework, and there was not much on TV anyway.... I used to secretly read by candlelight or daydream. I liked the dance of light on the wall and to invent [shadows] of animals with my fingers” (comment by “Ionut,” posted 3 August 2008, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2007/08/amintiri-din-copilarie/#comments>).

³⁶ Gas cuts also triggered nostalgic memories because of their association with Christmas celebrations in former times, and the warm atmosphere of family reunions. Scarcities did not spoil the fun, but rather enhanced it, for people used to save up goods for months so that Christmas was turned into a really special event. The low gas pressure, which was intended to prevent individuals from heating their apartments, meant that families experienced a degree of excitement when making *panettone* in adverse conditions, which often provoked dramas when a failure occurred. See Horia Gârbea, “Poveste românească de Crăciun sau Moartea și învierea lui Moș Crăciun,” and the related comments, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/05/poveste-de-craciun/#comments>.

many people did between apartment buildings.³⁷ The most comical memories relate to the lack of hot water. Bathing, which was at best a weekly affair, evolved into a lengthy ritual which mobilized the entire family for hours. Someone remembers even today that her family used to mix in the bath tub hot water (boiled on the gas cooker in huge pots, many times during the night, when there was higher gas pressure) with cold water to a proportion of twenty to nine.³⁸ On the whole, these memories depict the return to a way of life characteristic to medieval times rather than the end of the twentieth century.

These traces of Romanian communism stand out precisely because deprivations are remembered without anger. Although the generation of 1989, like those that went before it, unequivocally consider the abnormality of daily life in 1980s Romania to be the "bad" aspect of communism, their memories of this period stir in them more laughter than bitterness. The great absence from these recollections, in contrast to those of the previous age groups, is the secret police, the very institution that shaped the narrative of Romanian communism into a tragedy. "What has childhood got to do with the Securitate? When we were children, we never heard of it, we only heard about it in 1990."³⁹ Perhaps this explains why this generation, although deeply marked by the experience of the 1980s, is the only one which has retained the characteristic humor of those years. It was self-mockery that helped individuals to better cope with the daily miseries of late communism in Romania. After 1989, once the crimes committed under the former regime had been revealed by the generation of 1945 and disseminated by the generation of 1968, ironical attitudes toward this recent past appeared to be indecent. Almost two decades later, as the generation of 1989 searches for its own identity by revisiting the 1980s, it does so without wrath by rediscovering the long forgotten wit of those times.⁴⁰ In short, their stories of coping with the hardships of daily life in the last

³⁷ "I wake up around six o'clock and, while my mother was urging me to drink the tea made on a gas cylinder, I saw our neighbor making eggs and chips on an improvised fire in front of our block of flats. This impressed me profoundly because such methods are found only in the countryside. In cities we had gas cookers. After all, it is good that it is over" (comment by "Ceasuri," posted 31 July 2008, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2007/12/1980-1989-amintiri-de-atunci/#comments>).

³⁸ Comment by "Iuliduli," posted 14 January 2008, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2007/12/1980-1989-amintiri-de-atunci/#comments>.

³⁹ Comment by "Leu," posted 7 January 2008, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2007/12/amintirile-mele-la-30-ani/#comments>.

⁴⁰ Cristian Mungiu, one of the directors of *Amintiri din Epoca de Aur*, who also authored a very somber cinematic narrative depicting the daily tragedies generated in the 1980s by the criminalization of abortion, characterizes the urban legends of Romanian communism depicted in this new movie as 90% comedy and 20% tragedy (sic!). Cristian Mungiu, "Poveștile din communism au un potențial exploziv," *Adevărul*, 27 September 2009, <http://www.adevarul.ro/articole/cristian-mungiu-povestile-din-comunism>.

phase of communism are a blend of comedy and tragedy that do not contradict but rather complement the tragic narratives of suffering under the period of great terror.

Their memories also represented a different relation to the recent past, and heralded a new stage in the process of remembering, in which nostalgia is no longer repressed. The memory of the schooling system and its related activities thereby galvanizes their nostalgia and offers a clue to understanding what kind of past this generation longs for. Most representatives of this age group agree that education was better during their childhood than it is today. When measured against the current situation, the school system under communism seemed full of virtues. At that time, school conveyed a well-established set of values, which transcended the ideological imperatives of the regime; great canonical books supporting these values were voraciously read in the absence of other sources of information; and common social events inside and outside of school, sports, games, or other leisure activities created strong bonds among individuals.⁴¹ These nostalgic memories of the past are provoked above all by the problems of the present. The school system under communism seems to have been highly effective in comparison to the current crisis of the education system, which has resulted from a decline in the quality of the educators in a market economy in which there remains no genuine left wing that supports a fairer redistribution of wealth.

At the same time, school memories go beyond activities that are related to education and evoke a lifestyle that has long since disappeared following the emergence, widespread availability, and affordability of new technologies (laptops, video projectors, mobile phones) and information technologies (Internet).⁴² Such recollections refer to the time when children used to play together outdoors in the spaces between apartment buildings, instead of playing with their computers.⁴³ Such recollections refer to the time when children used to read lots of books because there were few other ways of developing their

⁴¹ "I also thought many times that we are the transition generation, we experienced how it was to play with friends around our apartment buildings, on football fields, in parks, but also with computers and the color TV set.... I think we can consider ourselves the happiest people because of all this, because we know how it was before and how it is now from experience, not from the stories of others. We are the last [generation] that experienced life (childhood) without being 'corrupted' by technology, without worries and problems. We are the end of one lifestyle and the beginning of another" (comment by "Dr. Me," posted 13 December 2006, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/12/generatia-x/#comments>).

⁴² Much collective effort was made to remember details related to schools at that time, which includes cataloguing stationery, uniforms, and other artifacts. For more about this see, for instance, <http://www.latrecut.ro/category/scoala>.

⁴³ Children's games were also central to these recollections, for those who remember them are conscious of having been the last people who played outdoors games that required nothing more than a ball. For more information, see <http://www.latrecut.ro/category/jocurijucarii>.

knowledge about the world.⁴⁴ Such recollections refer to the time when they had to wear their house key around their neck (their parents were compelled to leave them alone at home most of the day) but were free of worries because they had numerous friends close by.⁴⁵ In short, there is a longing for childhood as an age free of the problems associated with adulthood, but more especially because it was a time when social relations characteristic of the communist times were more stable. Otherwise, the memories of the generation of 1989 are connected to communism only by historical coincidence. Their youth coincides with a historical period during which communism was in place in Romania, but for reasons that are totally external to them. In fact, their recollections rarely refer to the regime. Someone even remarked that "there were moments when communism did not exist."⁴⁶ The generation of 1989 seems to be saying that life was good at that time because they were young, not because the communist regime provided social equality, financial security, or the like. In short, one might say that this generation remembers in a melancholic fashion the world not as it was before the revolution of 1989, but as it was before the Internet existed. The greatest irony is that (in contrast to the memories of older generations, which were conveyed in print) the place in which they express these memories is the Internet.

Conclusion

The civic militant and politically motivated memories of communism, which the generations of 1945 and 1968 conveyed for almost twenty years, have not been challenged but rather enriched by the nonideological memories of the gen-

⁴⁴ Telling memories relate to one of the most popular children's book, *Cireșarii* (The people of the cherry tree) by Constantin Chiriță, which narrates five adventures undertaken by a group of teenagers who served as role models for children at that time. This book is a true site of memory because it attracted more comments on websites than any other topic. See, for instance, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/04/ciresari-adevarati/#comments>.

⁴⁵ It is interesting to note how many self-derogatory memories were stirred by the "key around the neck." Many confessed how they used to chew its thread, which had a nice salty taste derived from their own sweat. Others remember how children distinguished themselves according to the type of key they had, which said something about the house in which they lived and the social status of their family. For more about this, see <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/03/cheia-de-gat/#comments>.

⁴⁶ The same individual continues by saying that "games and dreams existed even in the years of dictatorship... We played cowboys and Indians under a dictatorship, we dreamed and learned, we lived, we were free when others considered themselves to be oppressed, we spilled our blood while others were queuing for oranges, we believed in ourselves, we relied on ourselves, we succeeded then and we will succeed again, we, the last of the Mohicans, embellished with the feathers that Grandma used to oil the Christmas cakes" (comment by George Chiriță, <http://www.adevarul.ro/reporter-adevarul-foto/inapoi-in-comunism/rezistanta>).

eration of 1989. These recollections found their way to the public via various TV commercials, cinematic narratives, and especially via the Internet. The extensive use of the virtual space ensures that these memories are spontaneous. The authors are anonymous and wish to remain as such; their thoughts are not intended for publication and the construction of posterities. These recollections inevitably refer to the miseries of daily life in the 1980s. However, given that most of the authors were children or teenagers at the time, they are capable of looking back without anger, making fun at the abnormalities of the past, and even of acknowledging the value of that past. They remember life as it used to be at the time of their youth, recording not only types of bread, pastry, ice cream, and chocolates, or their most beloved books and games, but also the hardships of everyday life for children in the 1980s: "We got used to all these things and survived. If all these things never happened, what would we now recall?"⁴⁷ Conscious that they represent the end of a lifestyle and the beginning of a new one, representatives of the generation of 1989 regret the passing of the age of Gutenberg, even as they acknowledge the usefulness of the Internet. They also regret that one no longer has time for friends; instead, spending time alone in front of the computer. No one laments the passing of the communist order as such, for it did not offer them much, and all agree that those times should never return. However, they long for a lost childhood because they are facing the hardships of living in a highly competitive environment of ongoing transition, for which neither their parents nor teachers prepared them. The exercise of remembering the common past has brought the generation of 1989 together and given its representatives the certainty that they are not alone in this world, that other people feel and think as they do and, moreover, that they are the real "winners" of the transition.⁴⁸ The websites of memory have helped the last generation that experienced communism to build a collective identity.

⁴⁷ Comment by "Alex33," posted 21 August 2006, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/03/za-darc-said/#comments>.

⁴⁸ "While I was thinking that we were a generation of losers, you gave me reasons to understand that after all we are the winners, because we moved this country to the next century, where the old ones will never arrive, while the young ones will never know how it was before" (comment by "Mihai Hedes," posted 20 December 2006, <http://www.latrecut.ro/2006/12/generatia-x/#comments>).

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Communism seems to be a thing of the past. As this important book shows: it is not. Social and cultural practices in the eastern “half” of Europe are shaped by the experience of state-socialism. Collective and individual memories are the main mechanisms of how these legacies are actualized. This thoughtful volume, edited by Maria Todorova, Augusta Dimou and Stefan Troebst, is a powerful reminder of how different the historical experiences of Europe are and how relevant memory (and the study of it) is.

Ulf Brunnbauer, Managing Director of the Institute for East and Southeast European Studies, Regensburg

This volume provides an original contribution to the field of memory studies by addressing a hitherto less represented geo-cultural area, the Southeastern edge of the former Communist bloc, Romania and Bulgaria. By focusing on the dynamics of the process of remembering, instead of scrutinizing “frozen” images of memory, the contributing scholars suggest an alternative way for studying memories of dictatorships. Through their research, they explore the linkages between experiences of Communism, the society-specific particularities of the transition process and the images of Communism that gradually emerged in the last two decades. *Remembering Communism* fills in an important gap in the literature of memory studies and connects its particular findings with broader issues of remembering Communism and dictatorships.

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